

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Engagement, often associated with language awareness, motivational and instructional strategies, undeniably contributes to success in language learning and teaching (with experiential learning opportunities) or promotes *Communicative Competence* (or CC). According to Vygotsky (1987), in terms of the zone of proximal development, students become engaged in learning when teachers structure learning opportunities at the appropriate level and with the right support. In line with this, Philp and Duchesne (2016), in the context of classroom tasks, the definition of engagement was translated into “a state of heightened attention and involvement, in which participation is reflected not only in the cognitive dimension, but also in social, behavioral, and affective dimensions as well” (p.3).

Engagement makes a construct with enormous potential for students’ learning. It is argued to be crucial for learning (Appleton, Christenson & Furlong, 2008) and to be an indicator of academic achievement (Christenson, Reschly & Wylie, 2012; Lee, 2014). The point at issue is students’ engagement in a meaningful way is problematic in English as a foreign language (or EFL) countries (Dincer, Yeşilyurt & Demiröz, 2017). They stated that English teachers should be familiar with the influential factors related to classroom engagement, due to its importance in learning and teaching. One research, in Indonesia, asserted that studying students’ learning engagement (or SLE) is critical in EFL teaching to figure out the nature of students’ learning engagement (Suherdi, 2018).

Several studies (e.g. Nichols, 2014; Septina, Hasyim & Sukirlan, 2014; Sina-ga, 2009; Surahman, 2017) attempted to search for ways to make students engage in meaningful and authentic communication while anchoring learning, pedagogy to 21st century skill and world language content standards. The aforementioned studies, in the context of secondary schools in Indonesia, indicate that students’ engagement (displayed in students’ appreciation for the lessons) in enhancing CC is resulted from

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some preferences to the use of English movies (Septina et al., 2014), the use of both audiovisual material and collaborative reading quiz (Nichols, 2014), the implementation of simulation method (Sinaga, 2009), the implementation of Community Language Learning (CLL) (Surahman, 2017). In other words, media or tools or methods have been purposefully integrated within the learning instructions.

Meanwhile, a study by Cooper (2014), in the context of American students, revealed that among types of engaging teaching practices, connective instruction predicts engagement (for meaningful connections to classes) more than seven times as strongly as academic rigor or lively teaching; various teaching practices for engagement should strongly be considered. Some other studies have discussed how students' engagement was observed in language learning and teaching, such as Task-Based Language Teaching (or TBLT) (Lambert, Philp & Nakamura, 2016; Phung, 2016). This was then specifically investigated further, discovering the aspect of content familiarity and task repetition on Chinese EFL learners' engagement in the second language context (Karbalaie & Elahe, 2015; Qiu & Lo, 2016).

The above findings indicate that engagement would improve when tasks assigned are challenging in technically academic content or knowledge-based (meaning-focused). The tasks should be familiar, engaging, and personally relevant or personalized for real lives and experiences. Robinson (2001), in his study suggested that task difficulty or complexity, in a task-based syllabus, appears to increase students' interactions; thus, language production as a part of CC potentially improves.

The high level of CC or successful communication is most likely affected by the extent of quality level of students' engagement. It is a matter of the utmost importance for foreign language teachers straddling the line between the primary goal of any language learning and the 21st century skill. In regard to this, it has been stated by Trilling and Fadel (2009) that "Critical thinking and problem solving, 'communication' and collaboration, and creativity and innovation are three top-drawer skill sets in our toolbox for learning, work, and life in the 21st century". (p.60)

Lisa Husiana, 2018

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In language learning, language is used for communicative purposes and communication involves more than knowing accurate language forms. In other words, language—the main means of communication—should be constantly attended by extra linguistic elements that facilitate reciprocal comprehension or shared comprehension. Hymes (1972) argued that while a person acquires CC, he or she acquires both knowledge of the language as well as ability to use the language for real communicative purposes. Likewise, Brown (2000) emphasized:

Given that communicative competence is the goal of a language classroom, instruction needs to point toward all its components: organizational, pragmatic, strategic and psychomotor. Communicative are best achieved by giving due attention to language use and not just usage, to fluency and not just accuracy, to authentic language and contexts, and students' eventual need to apply classroom learning to previously unrehearsed contexts in the real world. (p.69)

More effective language learning can also considerably be enhanced to some degree when engagement—in behavioral, cognitive, affective and social dimension—improves; as stated by Philp and Duchesne (2016), “We are in a much better position to identify effective strategies for teachers and learners to maximize engagement and thus learning in the language classroom” (p.22). Again, as stated earlier, students' engagement (behavioral, cognitive and or social engagement) is noticeable in language learning and teaching, such as TBLT (Lambert et al., 2016; Phung, 2016). In line with this, Miller (2010) also stated that:

When instruction is planned with learners' needs and goals in mind, actively involves students in learning from one another, taps into their life experiences, and is challenging at learners' varying levels, learner engagement is likely to be strong, and learning is more apt to occur. Instructional approaches that can facilitate learner engagement include ‘task-based learning’, problem-based learning, project-based learning, literature circles, and classroom-based assessment. (p.2)

In other words, it shows how significant the study of engagement is in learning and teaching—to investigate how it contributes to success in language learning and teaching specially in task-based learning.

Lisa Husiana, 2018

A STUDY OF STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN ENHANCING THEIR COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Unfortunately, the aforementioned studies mainly focus on the importance of engagement in task-based learning in the context of English as a Second Language (or ESL) and students' specific focused language skill or language aspect only. Besides, not many studies discussed students' engagement in enhancing their CC, the competence which is often conflated with language proficiency and equated with the knowledge of the language users (Davies, 1996).

Most importantly, although the communication notion is salient in the National Curriculum or the *Kurikulum 2013*, prescribed in the objectives of English lessons, English teachers applying the *Kurikulum 2013* need more information about how to define and measure students' engagement. In other words, English teachers need to be provided with some information about how to create a place—"a place where learning happens" (Svalberg, 2009). In this regard, engagement is considered as a part of affective or *social competence* or *Kompetensi Sikap Sosial*, as cited in the decree of the Minister of Education No. 24/ 47 Year 2016 (*Permendikbud No. 24/ 47 Tahun 2016*).

Moreover, a study by Suherdi (2012) reported that "Competency-based curriculum (or CBC) is very demanding and there is a big possibility that the majority of the existing English teachers cannot meet the demand appropriately" (p.66). The researcher believes that the lack of teachers' CC (teacher's demand) will affect the quality of how those teachers perceive their students' CC and other types of competences, such as social competence (in the context of language learning). It should also be noted that, in the National Curriculum, the process-based learning is emphasized, which means students' participation or involvement is crucial in the learning process (Suherdi, 2013). In brief, promoting engagement and measuring it as well as enhancing CC surely remain the main responsibilities of English teachers.

Again, level of students' engagement determines level of holistic learning and teaching experiences for both teacher and students. Engagement indicates that the students' learning happens. It is expected that they will display their CC along the process within one learning instruction. English teachers, set in any learning in-

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structions including TBLT, need to be informed about the employment of engagement as one component of social competence.

Therefore, the study attempts to investigate the employment or the operationalization of engagement in one language learning approach, TBLT, in the context of EFL. It is to study how students' engagement improves students' CC as a part of language development (reflected in which CC component (s) that improved).

1.2 The Aims of the Study

The study is aimed at:

1. investigating how students' engagement in Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) improves their Communicative Competence (CC).
2. investigating what Communicative Competence (CC) components improved as a result of their engagement.

1.3 Research Questions

Revisiting the key issues above, several problems can be identified and formulated.

They are:

1. How does students' engagement in Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) improve their Communicative Competence (CC)?
2. What Communicative Competence (CC) components improved as a result of their engagement?

1.4 The Significance of the Study

For the researcher, the paper is going to be the self-reflection; whether or not, I, the researcher have taught for engagement in language learning and teaching (as a part of social competence), particularly in TBLT, or facilitated my students to enhance CC. Theoretically, the current study is expected to enrich information and understanding of the operationalization and role of engagement in TBLT, which still likely receives a little attention in Indonesian EFL context. The results of the study, practically, offer

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an alternative solution in the operationalization of engagement. Politically, the result of the study serves a purpose to determine the need analyses of language learners and teachers as well as the needs of language classrooms in order to achieve the goals (for the teaching quality).

1.5 The Scope of the Study

Employing a qualitative research and a case study, the study was conducted in a private senior high school in Bandung, involving 9 students of Science Program Year 10. It was a group of students in the researcher's regular class or Reading and Writing Class (classified as the upper class of Listening and Speaking Class). In the study, the researcher was also involved as a participant observer. Data collection to build the powerful picture was obtained from classroom observations, classroom interactions, reports, collaborative teaching, and interview with students. The analyses were focused on various dimensions of engagement, for instance, behavioral, cognitive, and social as well as CC components, such as grammatical competence, strategic competence, sociocultural competence, and discourse competences.

1.6 Clarification of Terms

Clarifying the terms used in the presentation of the study is essential to the intention of having similar understanding of them throughout. The following are the operational definitions of those terms:

1. Engagement is the extent to which learners try to complete the goals of the task by maximizing the available resources (Bygate and Samuda, 2009).
2. Behavioral Engagement is the extent to which a student exhibits some behaviors expected in a classroom—listening, doing assignments, following directions, and participating (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004).
3. Cognitive Engagement is the extent to which a student applies mental energy, such as by thinking about content, trying to figure out new material, and grappling with mental challenges (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Lisa Husiana, 2018

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4. Social Engagement deals with how learners interact and affiliate with their interlocutors. Learners demonstrate SE when they are interactive, initiating, and collaborative (Svalberg, 2009).
5. Task-Based Language Teaching is based on the assumption that linguistic abilities are developed through communicative abilities (Ellis, 2003).
6. Communicative Competence deals with (1) knowledge of underlying grammatical principles; (2) knowledge of how to use language in a social context in order to fulfill communicative functions and (3) knowledge of how to combine utterances and communicative functions with respect to discourse principles (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980).
7. Grammatical or Linguistic Competence is the study of ‘knowledge of language’ – what is often called ‘linguistic competence’ – in abstraction from the problems of how language is used (Chomsky, 1965).
8. Sociolinguistic Competence is defined as “the knowledge which underlies people’s ability to use language appropriately” (Holmes, 1992, p.440).
9. Strategic Competence is the ability to compensate for problems or deficits in communication and to do various types of planning (Canale & Swain, 1980).
10. Discourse Competence is described as mastery of rules that determine ways in which forms and meanings are combined to achieve a meaningful unity of spoken or written texts (Canale, 1983, 1984).

1.7 The Organization of the Paper

The paper is organized by chapters with the descriptions, as follows:

1. Chapter I presents background of the study, the aims, the research questions, the significance of the study, the scope of the study, clarification of terms, and the organization of the paper.
2. Chapter II outlines several key theoretical reviews on engagement, TBLT, CC, and other relevant theories.

Lisa Husiana, 2018

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3. Chapter III describes the methodology of collecting and analyzing the data, including the design, participants, data collection techniques, and analyses.
4. Chapter IV presents the findings and discussions on the obtained data from classroom observations, classroom interactions, students' reports, and interviews.
5. Chapter V, the last, serves as the conclusions, limitations of the study, and recommendations.