The Imagined Communities of First-Year English Department Students

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ABSTRACT

The role of imagination as Jingyan’s belief (2009) is not as a wild fantasy, but realizable goals (pg. 63). In learning, when the first-year English Department students have their imaginations, they will attempt to reach the imaginations as their goals. So, we can say that imagination has an important role dealing with the students’ education purposes. We conducted this study to investigate the imagination of first-year English Department students of Satya Wacana Christian University, Indonesia that made them decided to continue learning English in the university. The first-year English Department students’ imaginations toward their learning process further are called as imagined communities. This study addresses the following question: What are the imagined communities of first-year students of English Department of Satya Wacana Christian University? The participants of this study were consisted of 30 first-year English Department students of Satya Wacana Christian University which were chosen randomly. The data were collected by using open-ended questionnaire. The result showed that the imagined communities of the students were varied from “concrete models”, “expectation”, and “attitude”. “Concrete models” are people who become the students’ models in learning English, while “expectation” is about what they expect after learning English, and the last is “attitude” which means the students’ attitude toward learning English. We also found that these imagined communities have become their reasons in learning English further in the university. By knowing the first-year English Department students’ imagined communities, we are able to design appropriate methods to fulfill the students’ need.

Key words: imagined communities, first-year students, English Department

BACKGROUND

In this globalization era, the need of learning English as an international language is increasing. Especially for South-East Asian countries, English is believed to have important role as “gate keeper” (Nunan, 2003) to enter work world. Actually it impacts the learning itself because the aim of learning also for the sake of the learners’ future. Then, it is important for the learners to be successful in learning English which is affected by many factors. One of the factors is the learners’ imaginations. Here, the learners’ imaginations then are called as imagined communities, which refer to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible with whom we connect through the power of the imagination (Kanno & Norton, 2003). For example, when the first year students start learning English, they may envision themselves as the one who will get high-paid job, not only in the local country, but also can go around the world. In their imagination, they are recognized members...
of the high-paid employees, and English is seen as the important means of gaining the future affiliation.

The term of imagined communities itself, actually refers to what Anderson (1991) once mentioned as a communities that "is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p.6). Although the members of the imagined communities never meet or know each other, they have the same imaginations in learning English. They have the same idea why they learn English and what they expect in the future after learning English.

Compared to knowledge, "imagination is more important. For knowledge, it is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand" (Einstein, 1929). It is less useful if the learners just have broad knowledge without imagining what they will do by achieving that knowledge.

The role of imagination, as Vygotsky (1978) said that imagination plays a crucial role in students' development. Imagination is the one which can encourage students' motivation, behavior, and way of thinking in learning a language. They will work hard in order to achieve their imaginations toward learning English. The learners will struggle for the realization of their future imagination as Simon (1992) stated that imagination determined what kind of future is worth struggling for. When they learn English in order to get high-paid job, they will struggle hard for it. They tend to realize what they want and expect in learning English. A research of Norton and Kamal (2003) gives us particular insight into the students' hope for the future, and the ways in which their educational experience was implicated in the community they desired for themselves in the future.

As Kanno & Norton (2003) said that imagined communities have a powerful impact on the learners' education goals. Thus, imagined communities have an important role in directing the students to reach what they have imagined. Kanno and Norton (2003) also point out that language learners' actual and desired membership in imagined communities affects their learning trajectories and influences their investment and learning outcomes. Thus, learners' imagination also affect and play important role in learning outcomes. Also, these imagined communities have a great impact on their current learning. Pavlenko and Norton (2005) stated that how close learners see themselves to be to their imagined communities influences their investment in learning the target language, which is not merely an effort to improve a skill, but an attempt to establish their identities within an evolving community and to reach out to wider worlds.

Because of that importance of imagination, we are curious to conduct this research in order to know what the students' imagined communities are, so they decided to continue learning English deeper in the university.

Research Question

Based on our research purpose, we came up with a research question “What are the imagined communities of first-year students of English Department of Satya Wacana Christian University?”

METHODOLOGY

Participant

The participants of this study are 30 EFL (English as Foreign Language) college students in English Department of Satya Wacana Christian University, Salatiga, Indonesia. They are in their first year study who spend at least 18 hours in studying English every week. The participants were chosen randomly without any criteria in choosing them.

Instrument and Procedure

In conducting this research, we used open-ended questionnaire to collect the data. We chose open-ended questionnaire because we do not want to limit the participants' thought and feeling toward their imaginations of learning English. We provided seven questions in this open-ended questionnaire.

Before giving the final questionnaire, we did a piloting to 10 first year English Department students who are chosen randomly in order to find out the problem exists in clarity of the directions and the question item that might be confusing or difficult to understand. Then, we revised the questionnaire by changing the language from English into Indonesian because we found the participant confused about what we were asking. Moreover, we also revised two of the questions since the answers did not really answer as what we expected to. After revising, we gave the final questionnaire to 30 first year ED students who are chosen randomly.

We analyzed the data qualitatively by reading the participants’ responses written in the questionnaire several times. Then, we developed “tentative themes” by making some notes whenever the themes came to our mind. They are “concrete model, expectation, and attitude.” After that, we grouped the data based on the themes that we had. We made sure whether our themes are self-explanatory or not by showing our themes to some friends who know about imagined communities concept.

While grouping the data, we found that the data can be divided into smaller categories (substantive categories) which are “native, non-native, self-quality, self-desire, jobs, positive attitude, negative attitude.” Then, we added with the theoretical categories which can enrich our substantive categories.

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| Attitude                                      | · Self-Quality            |
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Data Analysis

The data was analyzed through filling the table as below:

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the data collected, we found that the imagined communities of first-year ED students are vary:

Concrete Models

They have several models who become their “reasons” to learn English deeper. The students mentioned they want to be able to pronounce English as native speaker does. According to Kachru (1986), native users of English are the ones who use English as their first language in almost all function. A student stated that native speaker is the best because “kita bisa menilai kemampuan kita dengan penutur aslinya (the learner can measure his/her ability in speaking English with the native speaker)”. Another student wrote Duncan Barlow (a native lecturer of English Department of Satya Wacana Christian University) because for him/her Duncan is native speaker and “berbicara dengan jelas (speaks clearly)”. One of the students even clearly wrote that Oprah Winfrey is a good role model for her because she “senang mendengar gaya bicara Oprah Winfrey yang menggunakan gaya bicara Amerika yang baik (uses a good American accent)”. However, some of them think that non-native English speaker can also be a good model in learning English. One of them regards “dosen, dekan, dan teman yang lebih pintar (lecturers, the dean, and their smarter friends)” as the good model. The other stated that “kakak sepupu saya yang lulusan FBS. Dia juga yang terus memotivasi saya untuk serius menekuni FBS (my cousin who was graduated from English Department. He is the one who always motivates me to be serious in leaning in English Department)”. All of the people belong to non-native English users which are defined to use an institutionalized second-language variety of English and consider English as a foreign language and use it in highly restricted domains (Kachru, 1986).

The learner may change their mind about learning English because by addressing to their imagination, they expand their self by transcending their time and space and creating new images of the world and themselves (Wenger, 1998: 176). The same idea with Norton, she explains that language learners invest personal resources such as time and energy in learning the target language in order to receive a benefit including social approval and material resources (for example, better employment, more money and better opportunities for their children). (Norton, 2000:10). As the learners imagine to have a good model for their English learning, they will try to improve their ability by providing time and effort to achieve what they want, at least they should have the same English ability with the models.

Expectation

The data also shows that the students also expect that English will give them more on self-quality. What we define as self-quality is about how the students reflect the progress and the development of their ability after learning English. They wrote that they want to have better fluency in English so that they are able to apply English for daily life. The students also want to master English actively and passively, that indicates a progress in their learning. A research of Norton and Kamal (2003) in Pakistan showed Pakistani students noted that knowledge of English would enable the Afghan children to communicate directly with people all over the world without the help of translator and to explain to the wider community how much they had suffered. This language is understood threw out the world. If the afghan children know English, speak English, they will be able to discuss their problems with the people of the world. Here, to achieve their imagination, Afghan children want to gain their English deeper so that they will easily use English by their selves. It is almost the same with what our participants answered the questionnaire. A student said by learning English, “saya bisa memahami dan menerapkan bahasa Inggris dalam kehidupan sehari-hari,” he wants to be able to understand and apply English in daily life. Other student also said that “saya bisa lebih mahir dalam bahasa Inggris,” this student wants to acquire English in his life. They learn English in order to be able to use English for their daily life.
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<td>She eagerly sought recognition from people who were fellow professionals, and wished to have a profession in Canada in which she could meet like-minded people. Her imagined community, then, was a community of professionals. (Norton, 2001: 164)</td>
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Moreover, by having good English they can get good jobs, as Clark (1998) define a component of a good job, they are pay, hours of work (both overwork and underwork), future prospect (promotion and job security), how hard of difficult the job is, job content (interest, prestige, and independence), and interpersonal relationship. Some students mention this job: translator, professional teacher, and ambassador. Norton and Kamal's research (2003) showed that many students noted that knowledge of English gives people access to resources that will give them greater opportunity in life. Therefore, by acquiring English, the students will have good prospect in their future life. As one student stated "I want to work abroad, as someone who deals with literature and art." Another student also said "saya ingin bekerja di perusahaan asing, karena lebih menjamin dan kemajuanya tidak diragukan (I want to work in a foreign company, because it is more reliable)" which means the students want to be a professional that have a big opportunity to improve their ability and get their good future with high paid and get promoted.

According to Norton, these imagination communities come into a community of professionals (Norton, 2001: 164). That statement reflects on the result of this study that the students' imaginations lead their thought that they will have good jobs as professionals.

The students also think that English is able to realize their dreams: going abroad, increasing self esteem and getting higher respect in social life. Norton stated 'if learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will increase their value in the social world. (Norton, 2001: 166). The students' imagined communities are not limited to 'their own values', but the students also concern about what other people think of their prestige. By learning English, they assume that people will see them to have higher social class than people who cannot communicate using English.

Attitude

The students actually have positive feelings toward learning English. They mentioned positive words, such as interesting, unique, and exciting. As the student stated that "sangat menarik, mengasyikan, tak pernah jenuh karena dosen-dosen, teman-teman, semua yang ada di uns, dan FBS sangat mendukung semua hal baik." (It is very interesting, never bored because the lecturers, friends, and everyone in English Department of SWCU always support good things). Another student also said that "menarik, karena saya setiap hari mendapat ilmu yang baru." (Interesting, because every day I get new knowledge). Although they have positive thinking and feeling toward English, they also have negative feeling like "learning English is sometimes boring". It is seen in student's statement "kadang-kadang belajar bahasa inggris membosankan" (learning English is sometimes boring). From the students' responses, we know that even though the students have negative feeling toward learning English, they keep on learning English in university.

CONCLUSION

Conducting this research makes us understand the imagined communities of first year English Department students. We also know that their imagined communities have become their reasons in learning English further in university. In fact, learning English is not only to achieve better job and future, but also enable them to have higher social respect and more opportunity in their life.

Although their imaginations not yet real, private visions may provide strong impetus for language learning (Norton 2000).

This research needs to be developed in order to find more benefits dealing with imagined communities and English language learning. McKay and Wong (1996) emphasize that a learners' needs, desires, and negotiation must be understood as a constitution of learners' lives and their investment in learning the target language. It is also important to notice the use of imagined communities dealing with the success of English learning for EFL students regarding the importance of English in this globalization era.

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