

**INFORMAL LEARNING SETTING IN THE WORKPLACE:
THE IMPACT OF INFORMAL LEARNING SETTING ON
THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PROCESS
EXPERIENCED BY *YCH INDONESIA*'S EMPLOYEES**

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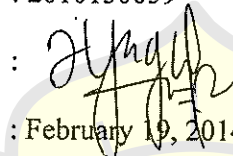
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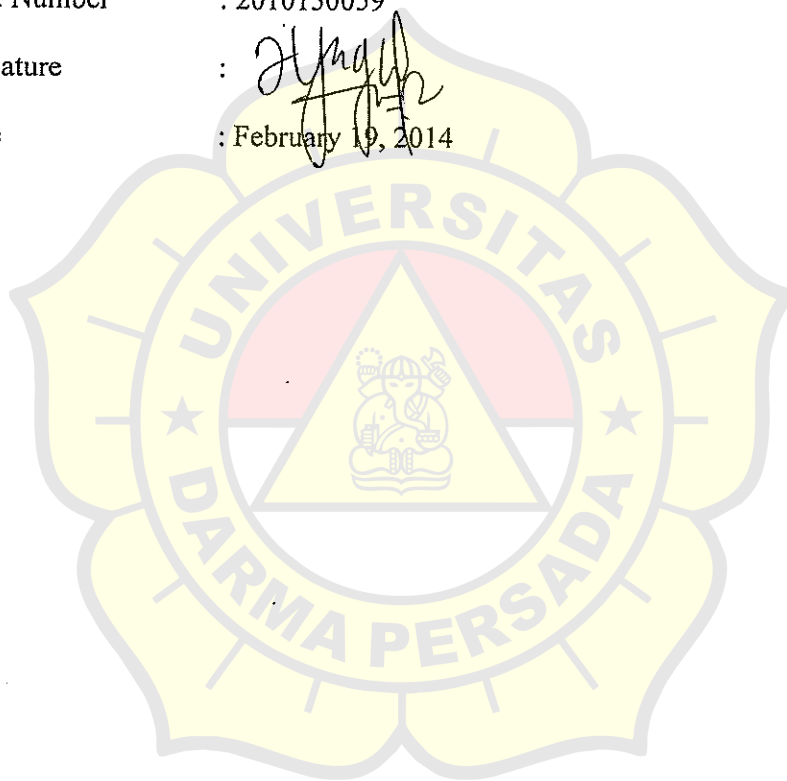
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ABSTRACT

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Title : Informal Learning Setting in the Workplace: The Impact of Informal Learning Setting on the English Language Acquisition Process Experienced by *YCH Indonesia's* Employees

This research examines the impact of informal learning setting, particularly that of the workplace, on YCH Indonesia's employees' aptitude for English language. In contrast to formal learning setting, informal learning setting encompasses a wider range of learning activities. By examining activities the target participants are most actively engaged in, favorable improvement on the linguistic ability of YCH Indonesia's employees is identified. In this research, two major research strategies—qualitative and quantitative approaches—are used, in which data are collected from published reports, journals, questionnaires, and interviews. This research challenges Long's (1998) argument that social setting is not substantial in Second Language Acquisition process. By propelling change in an array of current learning “myths”, skeptical views towards informal learning setting can be gradually altered.

Keywords:
learning, informal learning, linguistic ability, Second Language Acquisition.

ABSTRAK

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Penelitian ini mengkaji dampak dari lingkungan pembelajaran informal, terutama di lingkungan kerja, pada kemampuan berbahasa Inggris karyawan YCH Indonesia. Berbeda dengan lingkungan pembelajaran formal, lingkungan pembelajaran informal mencakup jangkauan kegiatan belajar yang lebih luas. Dengan meneliti kegiatan yang mana peserta sasaran terlibat paling aktif, kemajuan yang menguntungkan pada kemampuan berbahasa karyawan YCH Indonesia dapat dilihat. Dalam penelitian ini, dua strategi utama penelitian—pendekatan kualitatif dan kuantitatif—digunakan, dimana data dikumpulkan dari laporan yang dipublikasikan, jurnal, kuesioner, dan wawancara. Penelitian ini menentang pernyataan Long (1998) yang menyatakan bahwa lingkungan sosial bukanlah hal yang substansial dalam proses Pemerolehan Bahasa Kedua. Dengan mendorong perubahan dalam susunan “mitos” pembelajaran saat ini, pandangan skeptis terhadap lingkungan pembelajaran informal lambat-laun dapat diubah.

Kata kunci:
pembelajaran, pembelajaran informal, kemampuan bahasa, Pemerolehan Bahasa Kedua.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Problem

For numerous years, we have been aware only of the impact of formal learning setting provided by educational institutions. When we think about learning, the first thing that pops up in our mind is schools, colleges, or universities. This is simply influenced by the public conventional attitudes towards formal education. Many people are still reluctant to move on from the mindset that knowledge and skill can only be obtained through the means of formal education. Formal education is still seen as the “rite of passage” as far as knowledge and skill acquisition are concerned. The demand for formal education continues to grow. Parents urge their children to complete at least twelve years of educational program and view it as a foundation for their children to embark on a bigger “world”. Many people consider that knowledge of the world can only be gained through an orthodox way of a classroom-based learning where textbooks are treated as a “bible”. What they do not take into account is that there are social factors that should be accounted for as far as learning is concerned. Therefore, it is deemed necessary to change the public attitudes towards education as it has become a major barrier to the development of learning itself. People should come to see that knowledge and skill acquisition are not contributed solely by cognitive factors, but also by social factors.

In the context of language acquisition, research on language acquisition has been substantially conducted to show the contribution of social context to a learner’s linguistic ability thanks to the study of sociolinguistics. The study of sociolinguistics has widened people’s narrow perspective into accepting that there is a considerable link between social factors and cognition, particularly in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). This was specifically highlighted by Elaine Tarone in her research on sociolinguistic

approaches on SLA. According to Tarone, “*a sociolinguistic approach to SLA is one that studies the relationship between social contextual variables as interlocutor, topic, or task and the formal features of learner language or interlanguage (IL) production*” (Tarone, 2007). Interlanguage refers to the type of language produced by nonnative speakers in the process of learning a second language or foreign language. In her research, she emphasizes the importance of sociolinguistic aspect in SLA, claiming that social factors are important on the cognitive processes of the learner in language acquisition (Tarone, 2007).

Prior to Tarone’s research, Long has emphasized that conversational interaction enhances SLA through his Interaction Hypothesis. Long argues that interaction facilitates acquisition because of the conversational and linguistic modifications that occur in such discourse and that provide learners with the input they need. Through the resulting interaction, learners have opportunities to understand and use the language that was incomprehensible. (Long, 1996).

Following Long’s research on conversational interaction and its effect on SLA, a relevant study on informal language learning setting was raised by Rogers in his book *Teaching Adults*. According to him, “*informal learning is a natural process, part of being alive*” (Rogers:2004). Informal learning occurs naturally, hence unintentionally, in a person’s everyday life and is different from the non-formal learning that offers organized learning activities outside classroom settings. Rogers argues that in every activity that a person does, he is actually learning something. Another researchers, Coombs and Ahmed, in support of Rogers’ definition on informal learning, define informal learning as:

the lifelong process by which every individual acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment—at home, at work, at play: from the example and attitude of families and friends; from travel, reading newspapers, and books; or by listening to

the radio or viewing films or television. Generally, informal education is unorganized, unsystematic, and even unintentional at times, yet accounts for the great bulk of any person's total lifetime learning—including that of a highly "schooled" person" (Coombs and Ahmed, 1974).

Needless to say, informal learning happens anytime and anywhere. It has become an interesting phenomenon that involves a combination of learning from other people and learning from personal experience. In the workplace, learning process may occur through non-formal and informal learning settings. In big corporations where human resources development and training become a huge concern, non-formal learning setting can be designed to enhance either their employees' soft or hard skills through company-sponsored trainings. In addition, informal learning process may be unconsciously undertaken by employees in which learning process occurs through their personal experience such as their own working activities that gradually boost their skills.

In terms of acquiring a new language, contrary to informal English learning, a person who takes up an English major in college has learned English for at least ten years in formal classrooms. Yet, the years a person has spent in learning English in formal classrooms does not necessarily mean that that person shall be able to acquire the language itself, as a second or third language. However, learning English today has been much easier due to the easily accessible facilities which expose English learners more to the language. There are many informal activities out there that allow English learners to enhance their English skills almost as good as the native speakers themselves.

In an attempt to prove all of the previous research on informal learning, particularly in informal language learning conducted by linguists and scholars, I conducted a small research on how some of YCH Indonesia's employees had managed to acquire English language. In conducting my research, theories revolving on social settings in SLA and informal learning are specifically chosen to determine the impact on both social settings and informal learning in the SLA process of YCH Indonesia's employees. In addition, through this

research, which factors of informal learning that play the most significant roles in the SLA process of YCH Indonesia's employees will also be discovered through a series of questions containing informal language learning activities mostly done by the participants of this research.

In this research, the target participants were carefully selected from executive to senior managerial level, all of whom receive English instruction in formal classroom settings, but have varying degrees of informal contact with English outside the classroom. YCH Indonesia's employees are selected as my research target for many of its employees have acquired English as their second or third language. In addition, YCH Indonesia itself, as a workplace, unintentionally creates a supportive learning atmosphere for its employees. As a multinational company with a headquarter office located in Singapore, the company demands its employees to be able to communicate effectively not only with their colleagues in the country, but also with their colleagues from the headquarter office.

YCH Indonesia employs approximately eight hundred people, consisting of twenty one people at managerial level and above, thirteen people at assistant managerial level, and twenty seven people at executive level. Around 42% of YCH Indonesia's employees working at these three levels speak English proficiently where 95% of them did not take up an English major in college.

YCH Indonesia itself is a foreign investment company whose line of business is in the supply chain management. Its founder is a Singaporean entrepreneur who started the family business from a small transportation company. YCH Group is a multinational company with regional offices spread across Asia Pacific including Indonesia. With its nature of business, YCH Indonesia's employees are often time required to communicate in English with employees from its headquarter in Singapore. The two-way communication is done on a daily basis by YCH Indonesia's employees even by those working at officer and staff levels. Therefore, YCH Indonesia's employees are selected in

this research in order to assess the impact of informal language learning on their process of English language acquisition.

1.2 Identification of the Problem

Based on the background previously stated, the identification of research problem of this topic is the English skill of YCH Indonesia's employees who did not take up an English major in college but are greatly exposed to English through informal learning setting is better than those who have spent years in formal learning setting but have not been exposed to English in informal learning setting.

Based on the identification of problem above, I assume that the informal learning setting contributes greatly to a person's ability in acquiring English language as a second language.

1.3 Limitation of the Problem

Although this research was carefully conducted, there were several limitations that were inevitable. First, due to time constraints, this research was conducted only through a questionnaire without conducting an interview with each target employee. Interviews would likely give the researcher a broader social background of each profile, enabling the author to assess more on what exact informal learning factor that has more impact in their process of acquiring English as a second or third language. Second, since the research is based on the English skills of the target employees, an English proficiency test such as TOEFL is deemed necessary in order to measure the proficiency level of the target employees. However, most of the research participants have never taken an English proficiency test before; hence the author only conducted a simple proficiency test. In addition, since the proficiency test was only a simple test, the proficiency level of the participants might not be accurately measured. Lastly, since the author conducted a simple observation on the participants' English skills all by herself, it is unavoidable that in this study, certain degree of

subjectivity can be found. It would have been more objective if it had been observed by two or three examiners.

1.4 Formulation of the Problem

Based on the assumption above, the research problem is formulated in the form of research questions, as follows:

- 1.4.1 What types of informal setting which YCH Indonesia employees are actively engaged in?
- 1.4.2 What are the impacts of informal setting in the English language acquisition process of YCH Indonesia's employees?
- 1.4.3 In what way does informal setting influence the English language acquisition process by YCH Indonesia's employees?

1.5 Objective of the Research

In order to be able to reach the purpose of the research, the analysis steps are conducted in the following ways:

- 1.5.1 To identify the types of informal language learning which YCH Indonesia's employees are actively involved in.
- 1.5.2 To identify the impact of informal language learning in the English language acquisition process experienced by YCH Indonesia's employees.
- 1.5.3 To prove that informal language learning has substantial impact in the English language acquisition process experienced by YCH Indonesia's employees.

1.6 Significance of the Research

Through this simple research, the author expects that it can contribute to current English language acquisition research investigating the effects of informal language learning in the English language acquisition. Moreover, this research is aimed to open students', teachers', as well as workers' perceptions, attitudes, viewpoints, and participation towards the significance of informal

language learning. Consequently, this research might offer some empirical messages for English teachers about creating a fun learning environment that would be effective in terms of improving the English skills of their students. Through this research, it is expected that informal language learning could provide appropriate stimulations to everyone who aims to learn English efficiently.

1.7 Framework of the Theories

In conducting this research, theories revolving around sociolinguistic approaches to second language (Tarone:2007), sociolinguistic model of SLA (Fasold and Preston, 2006), and informal learning (Coombs and Ahmed, 1974; Marsick and Watkins, 1990; Rogers, 2004) are selected to support the author's analysis on the impact of informal learning on the English language acquisition process experienced by YCH Indonesia's employees.

1.8 Methodology of the Research

The research was conducted through a quantitative approach using questionnaires and a simple observation of the participants. The total participant is sixteen employees of YCH Indonesia who are active English speakers. The participants vary from executive to managerial level who are greatly exposed to English especially business English. The questionnaire itself contains questions about the informal language learning factors that might have contributed to their current English skills. From these questionnaire and observation, the author was able to collect data that supported various theories on informal learning environment that have substantial impacts on English language acquisition.

1.9 Benefits of the Research

This research is dedicated not only to students, but also to adult learners, as it is expected to be able to contribute to the recent development and

research on sociolinguistic approaches to learning, the unorthodox yet effective way of gaining knowledge and expertise. By the means of observing adult learners in the workplace, the author is able to prove the significance of informal learning setting on the linguistic ability of the target participants. As learning is universal, it is expected that this research can be applied to any other disciplines, apart from linguistics.

1.10 Systematic Organization of the Research

The systematics of this research contains four chapters:

- Chapter 1 Introduction : 1. Background
2. Identification of the Problem
3. Limitation of the Problem
4. Formulation of the Problem
5. Objective of the Research
6. Significance of the Research
7. Framework of the Theories
8. Methodology of the Research
9. Benefits of the Research
10. Systematic Organization of the Research
- Chapter 2 Fundamental Theories : 1. Second Language Acquisition
2. Formal Learning Setting
3. Non-Formal Learning Setting
4. Informal Learning Setting
- Chapter 3 Analysis : Analysis of the Impact of Informal Learning Setting on the English Language Acquisition Process Experienced by YCH Indonesia's

Employees through Theories of
Informal Setting in the Workplace

Chapter 4

: Conclusion

