

Research Article

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Teaching Project Based Learning in English for Specific Purposes

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Abstract

English course in Diponegoro University as the basic required course is offered mostly by the department without giving any prior consideration of its purpose, and mostly arranged by the teachers without any guidance from the departments. This study is conducted with the purpose to see the possibility of teaching English by focusing the materials on students' main competence and emphasized on student centered learning. The action research is targeted on having students use their English in demonstrating their main competence both in speaking and writing, through the method of Project Based Learning. The result shows that students are more motivated to study English and that it helps students to take the benefit of learning English for the development of their main competence. The further benefit is that students are able to increase their ability in academic writing and that they have more confident in speaking English. The main drawback from the study is that the groups work well to help students work more completely and easily, however it is true that since the works are mostly in group, individual problem may not be easily catered.

Keywords: project-based learning; ESP; Academic English; Collaborative learning

1. Introduction

The teaching of English as the basic required course in university is mostly conducted in similar ways with other general courses such as civics, or religion. In other words, English is offered for the freshmen, is designed in a large classes of more than 50 students, and that there is only very little or even no guidance, order, or whatsoever given to the English teachers teaching the classes, except for the schedule [1]. The fact that English is a language class is not yet being considered. The departments mostly do not design English class in a way that it will ease the teachers' job in shaping students' skills in using the language. However, some departments indeed have purpose in offering English class, and the purposes are in general describing the need for the departments to equip the students with general competence in English to support their field study competence. In a more specific reason, some departments set their goals in providing students with knowledge of

English for specific purposes, and mostly targeted on English for academic purposes, i.e. speaking and academic writing [2]. In line with what is hoped by the departments, most of the students also state that they do have purposes in taking English. In general, they take English because they want to improve their mastery of English. Furthermore, they also target themselves on more specific goals such as they want to be able to utilize their English to help them mastering their field study competence, to help them with their abstract writing, to get a higher score in TOEFL, and to have better opportunity to continue their study [3]. The purposes mentioned by the students highlight that academic features of English should be the focus in English course.

Teaching academic writing for non-English department students in a large class of more than 50 students is surely not an easy thing to do. This fact is also recognized by the English teachers due to many aspects. Teachers are mostly discouraged to teach academic writing by considering that the students' competence in English is various, that English is only taught for 100 minutes in a week, that teaching academic writing will result in more work load for the teachers because the teachers need to give feedback for students' weekly homework [1]. With such difficulties, it is not likely that the English teachers will be willing to teach academic writing, instead, most of them will dwell further on teaching grammar or reading.

Examining the above mentioned condition, I am interested to conduct an action research that is focused on finding a way to teach English for academic purposes in a way that it will help the departments and the students to gain what they expect in learning, and yet ease the teachers' burden in teaching academic writing. The focus of the action research is on project based learning and collaborative learning. It is important to conduct such research to see whether such model of learning will be effective in resolving the long standing problems of teaching English as the required course in Diponegoro University.

There has been some research related with project based learning and collaborative learning conducted with the goals of establishing an effective English class. Kozar [4] shows that through collaborative learning, learners are able to develop their own understanding of certain concept by understanding their friends' concept and evaluating their existing concept. Further, she concludes that it is not only the students who are challenged to become active learners, but teachers also gain some easiness in teaching. In other words, collaborative learning in the end effectively helps teachers in teaching although prior to the teaching, teachers need to make more preparations in regards to the materials provided for the students for their collaborative works.

Collaborative learning is a teaching method that is different from the traditional method, in which the learners are not asked to compete, instead they are asked to work together to understand the lesson. In collaborative learning, teachers are no longer holding the central role in the teaching process [5]. There are some benefits targeted from this type of model. First, because teacher is no longer holding the central role in the teaching process, he or she can have more freedom in giving feed back to the students. He can motivate the students to give the argument or to start an interesting discussion related with the topic. Second, because students are intended to collaborate to achieve the same goals, they have more chances to learn and to teach each other. In English for required course, it

is a common case that students who come from various areas and background, have different level of English competence. In collaborative learning, students who have higher level of competence may be able to help the other students. Third, within the context of learning English in big classes, collaborative learning will be suitable for the learning because the students can help each other and the feedback given by the teachers can be suitably given to the existing group.

Project based learning is also one of the strategies in establishing autonomous learning, thus, learners are challenged to actively involved in the learning process [6]. Project based learning is a teaching model in which students are doing tasks/projects which provide opportunities for the students to shape the four language skills by focusing on one main theme which interest them [7]. Yani [8] shows that students are actively involved in their learning process by conducting project based learning. Because they have the opportunity to design their own project, to decide what they want to focused at, and how they want to complete the project, learners are more aware of what they have learned, and they take the responsibility to complete it.

There are four benefits resulted from doing projects. First, students have a chance to do self-learning which in the end will help them to generate initiation and motivation in learning, because the students have the freedom to develop the project in accordance with their interest. Second, because the project has the theme that they like, the students will be more encouraged to finish it. Third, for non-English department students, the project can be integrated with their main competence targeted in their field of study. Therefore, they will be able to see how English is used to demonstrate their main competence. Fourth, with the development of present day technology, it will be easy for the students to get sources of materials needed for the project in a way that is preferred by the students, because most students today adore the use of internet and multi media. With the easiness to get the materials, students will not experience difficulties in completing the project.

2. Methods

This study is based on the action research conducted to Diponegoro University's students. Action research is a research activity conducted by teacher in applying one teaching method to see how such method will work well in achieving the goals of teaching, and how such method will help the students learn better. Such research includes "self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to explore your teaching context." [9]. In other words, in conducting action research, teachers are able to evaluate what they teach, to question themselves on how the method will help students understand better through a systematic method. In detail, in conducting action research, a teacher are doing these following four steps: planning, conducting the action research, observing the result, and reflecting what has been resulted for the future plan [9].

The action research is on the project based learning and collaborative learning focusing on the teaching of English for academic purposes and specifically on academic writing. The class design and teaching materials are decided based on the analysis of the questionnaires given to the head of the departments in Diponegoro University [2] and the

need analysis resulted from the questionnaires given to 500 students at Diponegoro University [3].

The population of the research is the students and the English teachers with random sampling on the departments in Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Economic and Business, Faculty of Humanities, and Faculty of Mathematics and Science. This research is conducted in different faculties due to the fact that any method and theory can generate different result when it is applied in different situation with different students. What is faced by teachers will be different, that's why it is necessary to study what method best applied in a certain situation. Understanding the diversity of the students, which will imply to the diversity of the problems, goals, and nature of the learning and teaching experience, it is hoped that these action research which is conducted continuously will help teachers to understand their teaching methods better, to be more critical on the strategies they do in class, and to be more flexible in choosing certain teaching strategies [10]. The action research is conducted to the samples for one semester, and in the end of the semester, the students and the teachers are given questionnaire to evaluate the teaching and learning process. The questionnaire given to the students are targeted to get the information on the benefit of the teaching model taught, and the questionnaire to the teachers are targeted to find out more on the difficulties experienced by the teachers throughout the process.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The Description of the Action Research

The action research conducted in Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Economic and Business, Faculty of Humanities, and Faculty of Mathematics and Science is aimed at examining how to teach English for Academic Purposes by using project based and collaborative learning. The basic consideration is on how the teaching process may be able to acknowledge the specific purposes of the learning targeted on utilizing students' main competence in their field of study and demonstrate it in English.

The teaching is completed in three months, starting from March 2nd 2020 till June 4th 2020, and each class is taught in 14 meetings. The class design is similar to the design of English class previously, similar as the other required course, the class is large with more than 60 students. Although most of the head of the departments understand that English course should not be treated in the same way as the other general required course due to its nature as language course, and some of the departments also set goals in offering the course [b], they still design the class similarly. There are some considerations in keeping the number of the students above 60 in English class, including the department inability to split classes due to the limited numbers of teachers and classrooms. Therefore, the action research is also targeted to see how the teaching model may accommodate the difficulties in teaching English in a large class, because in the future it will be still difficult for the departments to design English course ideally. With that condition, the teaching method in the university should be designed to acknowledge the factor of in-ideal class

such as the large number of the students and the various different level of English competence

3.1.1. The Goals in English for Academic Purposes

The action research is focusing on the learning of English based on English for Academic Purposes. The focus is generated from the fact that many departments who set goals in offering English class, set their goals for the ability in using English academically [2]. The departments understand that their students should master English and be able to use it to demonstrate their main competence of their field of study. This is also supported by the students' respond who also acknowledge the fact that they need English for academic reasons [3]. Therefore, the goals set for the action research is in accordance with what students' and departments' wants. On the students' side, it is considered beneficial if the teaching materials suit the students' need, in that they will be willing to put more effort in learning because they know that they are working towards their goals as well

3.1.2. The Course Outline

The teaching method applied in this action research is focused on the student-centered learning; it is the students that hold the central role of the learning activities. In addition, the learning is also based on the concept of collaborative learning, in which the collaboration and group works are set as the frames and the goals of the learning activities. With such method and concept, it is hoped that the students are able to pick up the lessons and develop them themselves. There are two reasons underlining the choosing of the methods. First, considering that students have learnt English for quite some time, and some of whom have quite high level of competence, teaching them again in the old fashion ways will be like repeating what they learnt so far. Therefore, it is hoped that student will be able to utilize what they have known to respond to the learning materials, and even to develop the materials. Second, considering that students have different level of English competence, by using collaborative methods, students will be able to help each other in a convenient way because of the equal type of relationship. Thus, the teachers will not feel overwhelmed with the many feed back they have to give, although the number of the students in class will still be large.

The teaching materials emphasized in the research is relied on the concept of complex sentences; adjective clause, noun clause, and adverbial clause, and also on passive sentences. The main reason for choosing such emphasis is because the students, by the time they graduated from high schools, they have learned all of the sentence structures and grammar, and therefore such materials will be considered as the pin point of what they have learned. Besides, in university setting, the academic text and environment have forced the students to be familiar with the use of complex sentences, so in the end it will help the students to read and to write academic text better.

The grammar focus, besides being explained by the teachers, are also taught in the form of task that will make the students understand better through their own finding. There are two major assignments assigned to the students. The first assignment is text analysis,

in which the students are asked to recognize the forms of complex sentences and passive sentences in the text. This assignment that is due on the week 7th, prior to the mid semester test, forces the students to find text in their own field of study and to identify the types of complex sentences in that text. By being able to identify the sentences, it will ease the students in understanding the content of the text. The second assignment is the project based learning, which asks the students to create a project campaign based on their field of study. The campaign project can be in the form of suggestion, prohibition, or other explanation of certain issue in their field of study. In doing the project, students are free to research their topic and develop it. The expected result of the project can be in the form of fliers, brochures, or poster. In addition, the students are asked to write the text of their campaign and present it in English before the class. In other words, this assignment targets on two main skills that will be evaluated by the teachers; their ability to write and their ability to speak about certain issue in their own field. This task is also designed to build the bridge on how the students can use their English to demonstrate the competence they learn in their field of study.

3.1.3. The teaching and learning process

The class is begun by administering pre-test with the purpose to figure out the level of English competence mastered by the students. By having such information, teachers then can group the students based on their competence. Thus, in one group, there are students with range of competence, from those who are able to use their English well and those whose English competence are not very satisfying. The pre-test is administered in the form of writing test where the students must write a paragraph telling their past experience, their present situation and their future goals. In administering the test, the teacher wants to see clearly how the students are able to differentiate the different use of verbs based on the tense.

From the result of the pre-test, then the students will be grouped of five, and this group will last until the end of the semester, not to mention that most of the class activities will be relied heavily on the group work. Besides the main assignments explained above, the students will also work on various group work almost in each meeting. Through the group work, it is hoped that the students will and teach one another of any materials given so that they can understand and perform better.

The class will be designed in three different main activities. First, the teachers explain the grammar points especially on the use of complex sentence, so that student will have better understanding of the concepts. Second, the students will have various types of exercises related with the material explained by the teachers. Each exercise is focused on their field of study. In other words, the exercises will be guided on how the students can use English to demonstrate their main competence. Third, the students will learn the materials through game and other class activities. These all are hoped to inspire students to be motivated to practice and learn English independently.

3.2. *The Benefit Gained from the Action Research*

In general, the benefit targeted in this teaching process is the fulfillment of the students' goals in taking the class. 82,3% of the students say that their goals in taking English is fulfilled throughout the lessons, and only 17,7% of the students respond that their goals is not matched with what they learn.

3.2.1. The material learnt by the students

In English as the required course, the students learn the four language skills and grammar, as illustrated in the following table:

Table 1. Students' perception on what skills are taught in English class

No.	Skills taught	Yes	No
1.	Speaking skill	97,4%	2,6%
2.	Writing skill	97,4%	2,6%
3.	Reading skill	92,1%	7,9%
4.	Listening skill	55,4%	44,2%
5.	Grammar	97%	3%

Table 1 shows that the students perceive that they are learning all of the four language skills in class, including grammar. More than 90% of the students say that they learn speaking, writing, reading, and grammar. These are in line with the teachers' focus, because the target of the lessons is focused on the teaching of reading, writing and speaking. Only 55,4% of the students perceive that they have listening lessons, while in fact the teachers do not allocate special time for listening lessons. However, it is true that the materials given are in the various forms, including the media, and students' speaking activities also involve exercises to listen. In that way, then the students consider that they are also learning the listening skills. Listening is the material which is not focused to be taught due to the lack of infrastructure.

In general, the materials focused in the research is the materials targeted to improve their speaking and listening skills. Therefore, it is important to see learners' perception on the benefit in learning such materials [11].

- Speaking skills

The skill targeted in speaking activity is the students are able to present an issue in their field of study in English. Although this target is considered high, the target is set anyway to see at what extend the academic speaking skills can be taught for students of non English department in such a little time.

The main difficulties encountered by the students in presenting the task is mostly due to the fact that they are not accustomed in speaking English, let alone speaking academically. However, since they do have much time to prepare for the project and at the same time to prepare on their speech, they can anticipate such difficulties.

- Writing skills

The writing skill in English is also one of the skills focused in this research. It is true that most teachers consider that teaching this skill could be very challenging due to the

many works and feed back that the teachers need to give afterwards [12]. However, since writing is essential in developing academic skill, it is necessary to see what could be the easy way to teach writing to the students, in a way that it will not put to much burden on the teachers and still the students can take much benefit from it.

In general, students are able to write paragraph in English. At university levels, paragraph-based writing is considered as the basic level of competence, as the target of academic writing is not merely on paragraph based writing but it can be extended to essay or research report [13] Their main problem, however, is on the accuracy in grammar and the coherence of the paragraph. In terms of the vocabulary used, the students have sufficient vocabulary to demonstrate their main competence. The grammar mistakes found in students work are not only on the use of complex sentences, as has been predicted, it turned out however that the mistakes also occurred in subject-verb agreement of the simple sentences. This should be catered as such simple materials are no longer the focus of the research assuming that such materials are considered easy and that students should have mastered them earlier.

However, although students make mistakes in simple forms, the students are also able to make good sentences in complex and compound sentences, which is considered as difficult grammar points. On the other hand, students are able to use a wide range of vocabulary. This is perhaps due to the fact that students are writing in their own main competence, a subject that they are familiar with and that they have more knowledge to share.

A part from the grammar accuracy, students' ability in composing paragraph with appropriate coherence is also becoming the main consideration. Students seem to have difficulties in incorporating appropriate supporting sentences in the topic sentences. Therefore, in their writing, sometimes, the ideas do not flow easily, because not all supporting sentences are in line with the topic sentences.

In general, the teachers have difficulties in teaching writing, considering that speaking and writing are mostly given as assignments. Moreover, due to limited time, the teacher may only have time to focus his/her explanation on the grammar focus targeted in making students easy in understanding complex sentences and in the end the students are able to use them in their writing. Therefore, individual feed back and step by the step exercises are not yet being enforced in this research. However, since the students are mostly working in group, it is hoped that the collaborative learning they are doing in each group will be useful for the students to learn from each other, and to fix their own mistakes.

3.3.2. The benefit of Project Based Learning

From the several classes conducting project based learning, there are some similarities of the benefit of the project and the difficulties experienced by the students. The most obvious thing that can be easily observed is that students are more confident in completing the project. The main reason for that fact is because students are allowed to pick their own topic in their own main competence. In that way, students are able to do a project on the topic that they are already familiar with, and therefore they can overcome the difficulties

related with the content, and they only need to concentrate more on demonstrating that topic with their English either in written or in spoken English.

It is true that not all students are comfortable to speak in English. This may due to many things, one of which is that they are not accustomed in having communication in English. Besides, some students do not have enough confident in their own English, and therefore they do not have enough courage to show it.

4. Conclusion

Project based learning can be one of the solutions in offering more focused and purposeful English course in university. The main benefit of it, is that the students are able to work on the topic of their own main competence, hence they can minimize the difficulties in completing the project. Furthermore, since they are still focusing on their main competence, students are able to utilize their English and take the most benefit of learning English for the development of their own main competence.

Giving project for the students also answers the departments' need in providing a course that should be useful in supporting the main competence targeted by the department. Besides, the project also give easy and affordable work for the teacher to accomplish many target. It gives the students plenty exercises to work with and yet the teacher could not feel overwhelmed with the many work nor feed back that they have to give to the students.

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