

TEACHING STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED BY TEACHERS OF A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY TO FOSTER STUDENTS-CENTEREDNESS

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Background

There have been significant changes in the ways the languages are taught. The teaching techniques have also been expanding, from the traditional teaching technique which is a teacher-centered instruction into, a student-centered instruction (Brown, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Richards & Renandya, 2002). Therefore, teachers need to figure out ways to make their teaching performance effective and fit into their students' characters in order to empower students as active language users.

Problem Identification

Being urged by the educational changes, English teachers need to carefully consider the following aspects of classroom instruction. The first aspect is creating students' friendly learning environments which can minimize students' anxiety to communicate in English and which can stimulate students to actively participate in the classroom discussion. The other aspect is providing a variety of practical English activities and tasks which can be applied in the real-life communication contexts.

Referring to the main challenge faced by English teachers which is to actively engage students so that they could learn, discover, experience, and become autonomous learners, the goal of language learning especially in higher educational level is then to develop what John Dewey (1938) and Rogers (1951) refer to as a 'student-centered learning' which is an approach to education that focuses on learners and their needs. According to Collins and O'Brien (2003), student-centered learning (SCL) or student centeredness is an instructional approach in which students influence the content, activities, materials, and pace of learning. This learning model places students in the center of the learning process. This is a learning model in which students play an active role in their own learning styles and learning strategies.

This research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What strategies are used by teachers to foster students-centeredness?
2. How are the strategies implemented in the teaching and learning activities?
3. What are the impacts of the strategies on the students?

Literature Review

Some educational experts have pointed out the importance of adapting student-centered learning (SCL) in language learning.

1. Helps knowledge and skills to be grasped more extensively and permanently (Lont, 1999).
2. Helps students to get their own goals for learning, and determine resources and activities guiding them to meet those goals (Jonassen, 2000).
3. Empowers and enables students to take control over their own learning and rely less on the teacher as a dictator of knowledge (Pedersen & Williams, 2004).
4. Engages students actively in the learning process, becomes aware of their own responsibilities, sense of autonomy in learning and learned from their experiences (Seng, 2014).

However, there are some challenges and constraints faced by teachers in implementing SCL approach.

1. SCL focuses preliminary on the individual learner without considering the needs of the whole class (Simon, 1999).
2. SCL may not be suitable for developing countries where there are limited resources, different learning cultures and large classes like in Asian countries, such as Indonesia.
3. SCL approach requires a careful design of the learning process, which includes the classroom setting, flexibility of the curriculum, teaching methods, assessment policies, and course content (Jones & Thomas, 2005).

Methodology

Research Design

To investigate the application of student-centered approach in English language teaching, a descriptive qualitative was employed as the research design.

Research Setting and Participants

The setting of this study is at one of the private university in Yogyakarta. This department has been implementing student-centered learning approach since it was established in 2010. Its curriculum has also been reviewed and revised ever since. Three-teacher participants were selected purposefully based on their willingness to participate in the study. Their academic qualifications ranged from master to doctor with more than 2 years teaching experiences in this department. Permission was sought from all participants orally before the interview.

Data Collection Instruments

The present study utilized interview. The data were gathered through interviews with 3 teacher-participants. One-to-one interviews were carried out to understand the teachers' points of view and their experiences with regard to SCL approach. The participants' identities were made pseudonyms throughout the research report.

Findings and Discussion

The Strategies Used by Teachers to Foster Students-Centeredness

1. Reading Assignments

One of the participants stated that she always thinks that reading is important in learning teaching process, especially in language teaching. Therefore she always encourages her students to read. The books used in the course book journal are literary works like novel or short story as an addition for the course book. Besides asking her students to read, she also checked whether or not they actually read by having 'Closed Book Journal' activity. Closed book journal is an activity where the teacher gives a short question depends on the semester. For the first semester students, the question will ask the students to retell what they have read, while for higher semester students, the question requires the students to summarize or to analyze, and to synthesize what they have read.

2. Discussion

All the participants stated that they implemented discussion in the teaching and learning activity. However, the implementation of discussion is various among the teachers. From the interview, it was found out there were three different types of discussion, which were, pair discussion, small group discussion, and the last was the class or whole group discussion. Besides, the content of the discussion is also various. One participant stated that she required the students to discuss the assigned readings which were not about the course topic and also to discuss the course topics.

3. Presentation

The second and the third participants admitted that they required their students to presents the course topics either in pairs or in groups. Especially in the speaking classes, usually the teacher paired students to communicate in English about the topic being discussed. The third participant even assigned the students in the beginning of the meeting distributing the groups and also the topics of the presentation, so that students can have more time to prepare.

4. Role Play

From interviewing the second participant, the researcher found out that the teacher applied role play as one of his teaching strategies. In speaking class, the teacher asked the students to perform role play acting out the assigned case or situation.

5. Games

Undeniably, game can be used in language learning. As admitted by the second participant, he implemented games in most of his classes. Some of the games used in his classes were *Hawaiian Skirt*, *Mind Describe and Draw Activities*, and *Speaking Card games*.

The Implementation of Strategies in the Teaching and Learning Activities

1. Discussion

From the interview, it was revealed that teachers usually have discussion done either in the first half or in the second half of the class session. One participant who applied closed book journal stated that she used discussion before or after the question (closed book journal) begins. Prior to the closed book journal activity, students shared with their group of what they have read. While after closed book journal activity, students shared what they have written in the closed

book journal. In the second half of the course, the students are required to discuss the topic of the course, and discussing one of the chapters in the course book. Besides, in order to maximize the result of the discussion, the teachers divided the class into groups. Depending on the topics, the number and the size of the group are also various, there is a pair, small group and the class discussion.

2. Presentation

In regard with presentation, the presentation was done in pair or in small group. Each group were given a specific topic to be presented and discussed. After the presentation, there usually was a question-answer session where the other class member contributed to ask or to help answering the question. Besides discussing the topic in the course book, the group was also required to connect the topic which is being discussed with the real things happened in the field, so that they can critically analysis the case. Then, after the session finished, the teacher's role is to clarify things which is unclear and misunderstood

3. Role Play

One participant shared his experienced in implementing role play in his speaking class. This role play became the final project done in groups, which the teacher named it as a group project. The teacher provided the theme for the role play. However, instead of directing, the teacher acted as a facilitator of the students. He only provided ideas which was about Indonesian folktale. Then, students could come up with ideas, any legend from their own area. He stated that he wanted the students to experience themselves.

4. Games

One participant shared story that the strategy he used the most in his classes is using games. To check students' understanding about the topic, he used games. He stated that he used games for both reviewing what they have discussed and brainstorming ideas before discussing the topic. Besides, he believed that students, especially the first year students, like to have fun activities, therefore he used games since it involved motoric. One of the games he used in the previous semester was the Hawaiian Skirt, which was used when they were discussing about daily activities. Hawaiian skirt is actually pieces of paper. Teacher give the jumbled sentences, then the students have to make it into correct order and put them around that makes it look like a skirt.

The Impacts of Implementing the Strategies on the Students

The results from interviewing the participants showed that there are some significance impacts of implementing the strategies in language teaching and learning. The discussion is categorized into two, which are the impacts on students' language skills and the impacts on students' soft skills.

A. The impacts of Implementing the Strategy on Students' Language Skills

The first significant impact was on **students' speaking skill**. The strategies the teachers used resulted improvement on **students' pronunciation and intonation**. The third participant stated that in the role play, because that was a playback role play which means it was recorded, students needed to practice repeatedly for the recording. Therefore, he could say that the activity was beneficial for students' pronunciation and intonation. Besides, by doing the final group role play project, the participant admitted that the students were exposed to the certain language expressions used for the communication between players.

Another significant impact was in terms of **writing skill**. One of the participant stated that students' writing improves a lot, because she gave them feedback to their writing. She always read and returned students' writing with her feedback. Usually students only wrote two or three sentences to answer the question, but in the end of the semester, they could write some more paragraph with the main idea, supporting and conclusion.

The interview also revealed the improvement on **reading skill**. First participant argued that by implementing closed book journal, students' reading interest increases. The fact that they always read before they come to the class was one sign. Besides, at the end of the semester, everybody had read the whole book that she assigned for that course.

B. The impacts of Implementing the Strategy on Students' Soft Skills

The first significant impact on students' speaking skills was making students more confident and critical in expressing their opinion. Two participants argue that after the implementation of the strategy, the students were more confident in expressing their opinion at the end of the semester. A lot of her students were not shy in expressing their opinion in whatever thing it is.

The second significant was the activities enabled students to be more independent and autonomous. The first and the third respondents argue that the good thing was the students autonomy also improved in this method that they used.

The activity of doing the final group role play project was beneficial for students' soft skill in terms of discipline and group work. The last participant argued that in team work, students have to prove it. The project will not work without discipline and team work. He could see which group has the best team work and discipline from their performance.