

MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM: TEACHER'S REFLECTION IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FROM NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING COUNTRY

Rohfin Andria Gestanti, Elok Putri Nimasari, Restu Mufanti

Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo

rohfigestanti@umpo.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This present article aimed to elaborate the challenging problems that have been encountered by multicultural classroom teacher and how to deal with it. Heterogeneity in classroom is a common issue in language learning, especially with the involvement of multiculturalism. In this globalization era, the emergence of educational exchange causes students from a country takes their higher education in another country having better quality and reputation. Those students are commonly addressed as international students. The enrollment of such students is perceived advantageous for the university since it improves the international recognition. However, it also requires some efforts concerning the multicultural issue such as language, so that the students may successfully accomplish their study in a country, which the native language is different from their native. With regard to this condition, the use of international language as a means of communication is unavoidable. However, in some circumstances, the use of native language in which the students take their study is more required, depending on the educational policy in appointed university. There are several students from Thailand taking their study in a private university in Ponorogo. Concerning the language, most of them are not mastering both English and Indonesia. As a result, teaching those students might be challenging due to misunderstanding communication that may occur in the classroom, especially for students who do not enroll in English Department. It presents the author's experiences in teaching English for specific purposes in Communication Science Department of this university.

Keywords: *multicultural classroom, international students, English language learning*

INTRODUCTION

The development of technology as a means of communication in this 21th century era had brightened up the field of education, particularly the higher education. Originally, students enrolling in a university are bordered by sort of thoughts that choosing an institution and a study program is a hard thing to do because they need to consider some aspects such as distances, tuition fees, and university access. Compared to this condition, thanks to the involvement of technology, education nowadays has applied new systems and programs that give chances for students to choose the institution as well as the program they want to enroll as easy as possible. This technology assistance has provided students various



paths to enhance their learning ability and has opened their perspectives that learning has entered a wider, more global era. As a result, students applying for a program in a certain university do not merely come from only certain local area, but also overseas students. This condition drives the development of intercultural education (Croese, 2011).

Multicultural education is the involvement of several cultures including language, family background, beliefs, and values carried out by students in a certain educational setting (Alsubaie, 2015). These multicultural diversity is actually used to drive the successful learning (Eight, 2010). It means that there are interactions of students whose cultural background are different. Moreover, information free trade, technology enhancement, and global partnership among people are some factors that influence the emergence of intercultural education. The policy makers in higher education now realize that education fusion in a globalized world is an evitable issue. What the institution provides is expected to be able to cover the heterogeneity of the members involved in teaching learning process. Therefore, it is expected that both the students and the institution are aware of the globalized education they are encountering.

The new perspective of global, intercultural education increases the students' needs of getting more higher education that is qualified. Students tend to consider to study abroad and choose overseas university that supports their requirement. That is why some higher education institutions take advantages of this situation by developing institution internationalization, making the institution globally known by foreigner. In other words, it can be said that internationalize the institution is an approach to develop a better education standard to a new level (Croese, 2011).

Officially started in 2014, a private university in Ponorogo welcomed overseas students as the result of some cooperation with several education institutions in Southeast Asian countries, including Thailand. Therefore, each year, some students from Thailand enroll in several study programs in this university. Most of them choose to take English program as their major while some of them are interested in other fields in spite of their minimal proficiency in communication. Of course, interacting in an intercultural or multicultural context requires all the



involved members to use a language that everyone can understand, especially during classroom interaction. Otherwise, it may lead to a miscommunication situation. It may not be a problem if the international students are enrolling in English Department. They can learn the language for communication more conveniently, since it is a part of their subjects.

However, the problem will be different when they learn another subject. Two of Thailand students who study in this university enroll in Communication Science Department. In this department, English is programmed as general requirement subject with only two credits. The situation and condition in this institution requires the teacher use both English and Bahasa Indonesia during the teaching learning process. However, having two international students in the class bring dilemma for the teacher since it involves Multilanguage interaction. In this case, the teacher should be able to manage the communication with both Thailand students and Indonesian students whose English proficiency is different one to another.

This article presents the situation of multicultural classroom and international students in addition to the elaboration of the challenges that occur during the lesson. In other words, it is a reflection essay of what is experienced by the author as the teacher of English subject in non-English Department with some international students involved. In short, how multicultural classroom and international students leads to a challenging teaching and learning process and how to deal with the situation are the focus to be elaborated.

DISCUSSION

International Students within Multicultural Classroom

Institution internalization is a paradigm in which local institutions start developing their intention to be known globally (Krechetnikov, Pestereva, Federation, & Federation, 2016). In this era of increasing technological changes and intense globalization trends, the opportunity to make the higher education go global is widely open. The internalization of higher education institution has created changes in respect with teaching practices (Theodoridis, 2015). Moreover,



challenges in education and future career also influence the emergency of this new paradigm. In other words, universities in a certain country are motivated to make several changes concerning their education system, facilities, and maybe their policies in order to embrace the internalization (Chen & Huang, 2013).

International students or foreign students are those who come from overseas to study in a university outside their countries. Generally, they enrolled in certain university overseas due to several reasons, for instance receive scholarship, have interest in certain university or country, or to fulfill requirement from former institution or organization (Chen & Huang, 2013; Falcone, 2017). Foreign students usually need to complete some requirements asked from the host university during their enrollment. This is done to make sure that those students will be able to fully comprehend the applicable regulation in new institution and to communicate well with teachers and peers during their study. It is based on assumption that students coming from overseas speak different language (Gretta, 2001). Therefore, language comprehension is indeed important to master, particularly certain language used in host country.

In this case, the foreign students come from Thailand, a non-English speaking country in Southeast Asia. Since the local and international students speak two different languages, English as lingua franca is supposed to be the means of communication to bridge the gap. However, the foreign students do not seem having good English proficiency. Moreover, this university has not yet uses English as its official medium of instruction. This condition leads to a multicultural issue regarding way of communication that in long term, it may affect how the teacher conducts the teaching activities. Simultaneously, it also has effect on students learning achievement. Therefore, it is possible that the teacher and the students of both countries may encounter cultural-related issues In other words, it can be said that having foreign students whose language and culture are different from the local one turns the class into multicultural classroom.

Multicultural classroom refers to a classroom that embraces the cultural diversity of the students. It occurs when there are one or more students with several cultural backgrounds coming from different ethnicities (Briggs, 2016; Cvetkova &



Andonovska-trajkovska, 2014; Gretta, 2001). Simply, the term multicultural – or intercultural – shows the various way of interaction since the participated people come from different country and possibly speak different language. Originally, this concept is perceived as advantageous aspect of effective learning to help students gain more knowledge beyond their current background. The term “salad bowl” is even used to portrait the various students’ aspects that somehow meaningful on their own as well as get along with other students to create a fruitful taste of language leaning in the classroom (Khatoon, Rehman, & Ajmal, 2011). However, since there is more than one cultural backgrounds underpinning the learning activities, multicultural classroom gradually face problems related to the teacher-student communication.

In Indonesia tertiary context, multicultural classroom has become a common issue as Indonesia itself has many cultures throughout the country. The various cultures, local languages, beliefs, and values owned by Indonesian people indirectly turn the Indonesian classrooms into multicultural ones (Nakaya, 2018). Moreover, the different context of education also drives the formation of such classroom. Therefore, with the involvement of international students, the context of multicultural classroom is somehow broadening. However, since Indonesia is not commonly known for its education, the number of foreign students is not as many as other countries, such as America, Australia, England, etc. even though Indonesia is a multicultural country, the art of having various cultures as is not widely exposed.

Concerning this situation, there are several aspects contributing the condition why multicultural classroom in Indonesia is not as exposed as the other countries. The first reason is concerning the readiness in welcoming new cultures (Alismail, 2016). Regardless the acceptances of institution internalization, some higher education institutions are not quite ready to accept the changes in their education system. Admitting foreign students requires university to provide comprehensive system that can facilitate students in their study. To embrace foreign students with their new cultures, the institution should be ready to anticipate the issues concerning the internationalization itself. Moreover, it also requires the teachers to have certain level of competency to make them credible teach such



classroom. In fact, some teachers probably are not open enough to provide new changes in their teaching. The difficulties and obstacles that come along with new cultures make teachers do not embrace multicultural education (Kolano, Lachance, & Coffey, 2014).

Meanwhile, the bigger reason is concerning the situation and condition in Indonesia itself, particularly concerning the higher education system. It has been mentioned in the previous section that Indonesia is not an English speaking country. Even, English is treated as foreign language. This condition leads to a fact that higher education institutions in this country do not make the use of English a mandatory. Therefore, when it comes to foreign students' admission, debatable situation on students' services is inevitable.

RESULT

Teaching English in Multicultural Classroom in Ponorogo

Teaching foreign students is a big challenge for teachers because the roles of teacher are to deliver materials and help students understand the materials as well. In this era, teacher's duties are not only to provide the main source of knowledge but also to help students embrace their learning activity. Such duty is more challenging when teachers should deal with the communication with foreign student. In this case, communication between teacher and students in learning is very important because it is the only way students understand teacher's explanation. Moreover, having difficulties in communication will cause obstacles for teacher in delivering materials or giving assignment, instruction, etc. (Nadda, 2017).

The diversity employed by the foreign students requires the teacher to be aware of the learning preference, way of interaction, and task completion of such students (Islam, 2017). Since the students speak two different languages, the whole members of class should come to a concession of second language. Especially in English subject, English must be the medium of instruction. However, this causes a problem when most of the class members do not comprehend English well.

In current tertiary setting, the requirement to use English as instructional medium is not mandatory, even in English classroom. Bahasa Indonesia is still



considered as the official language in the institution, therefore the use of English is not significant. Moreover, since the foreign students from Thailand are less than 5%, the use of English is optional depend on the ability and willingness of the students. This situation is quite problematic in English classroom. On one hand, the teacher is obligated to facilitate the students in improving their English knowledge and ability by still utilizing students' native language to emphasize the important material. Meanwhile, delivering the material by mixing the students' native language in multicultural classroom is difficult to do since the international students come from non-English speaking country. In usual classroom, the teacher usually speaks in English for general classroom interaction to make the students get used to English context. However, sometimes, the teacher also speaks in Indonesia during material deliverance in order to ease the students catch up the core. The use of students' first language is still utilized in order to make the student fill the gap and comprehensively understand the different concepts of L1 and L2 (Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014). Since the teacher does not master Thai language, the only language use to communicate is English. However, it seems that the foreign students do not master English well. It is seen from the flow of the interaction.

There are several situations in which the students misunderstood what is said by the teacher. For example is when one of them is asked to present a text in front of the classroom. She understood that she had to come forward, but she did not understand what she should do in front. As the result, she only stands there while showing questionable expression representing their confusion. From this situation, it can be said that language barrier the one of the biggest issues in multicultural classroom. The different languages speak by foreign and host students somehow influence their interaction in the classroom that later on, it will affect to their grades and achievement (Ota, 2018). This situation is getting worse if both types of students do not master comprehensively the bridging language.

After encountering such similar situation in several first meetings, it is assumed that the English proficiency of the foreign students is not as good as what is expected. This is also indicated by their passive participation during classroom activities. Whether it is during peer discussion or classroom discussion, the foreign



students did not show active participation, did not initiate to speak first, and remain silent during the lesson. In addition, during assignment consultation session, the teacher found it difficult to explain the content and the procedure of the assignment. There is none in this institution who can interpret the conversation. Regarding this situation, the students solely rely on the machine translation in their smart phone. Since conversation is a direct communication, the use of machine translation is somehow distracting. The talk cannot run smoothly, the frequency of pauses is increase, and it takes longer time to complete the process. At first, the teacher had no idea if the foreign students are having problem with the second language. Since the teacher was giving material English for specific purposes classroom, the teacher tended to use English during the lesson. Moreover, having international student is expected to motivate the host students in learning English. In fact, the different language employed by the students widens the gap of interaction.

Lack of communication in learning English as a foreign language causes several less good impacts for both teacher and foreign students. First, the effect of different language originally used by the teacher and the students makes them uncomfortable during the teaching learning process. In this case, the teacher feels burden as the students cannot follow the material well. Moreover, miscommunication due to different language use may be a great obstacle for international students who do not speak nor know Indonesian or English well. Every university has its standard for its students and this standard is included into students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor competence (Falcone, 2017). When students lack in their communication and tend to being passive, of course, they seem to fail in accomplishing the requirement of cognitive and psychomotor competence. Automatically, those students also fail in achieving the university requirement.

Another problem encountered by the teacher in teaching in multicultural classroom is the difficulties in giving assessment. Usually, assessment of students' achievement is given during the lesson and after the lesson. During the lesson, the teacher needs to observe how the students learn, how they perceive the material, and how they interact with their friends. Assessment on the learning process is important to do because the teacher may identify early what problem the students



have in their learning. Moreover, the result of on-process assessment allows the teacher to make some changes concerning the teaching strategies, teaching media, and classroom setting, and so on. Meanwhile, giving assessment after the lesson is mandatory since it is the requirement of the institution. In addition, such assessment is important for teacher to know how far the students learn as well as to know the final result of students' learning (Tonbuloglu, 2016; Witsel, 2003).

However, teacher could not perform the assessment well, particularly the on-process assessment, because the teacher barely seen the progressive process of the foreign students. Their passive participation and their limited interaction with both teacher and friends limit the teacher to see through their learning process. Even during the consultation time, the teacher can barely communicate with them due to the language barrier. As a result, it is difficult for the teacher to give feedbacks on these students' progress.

Besides, the foreign students rarely consult or report their learning problems or difficulties. From teacher's view, it is assumed that their passive progress in the classroom is influenced by their personal traits. It seems that they are shy and have no confidence when they are interacting with others. Since they could not understand well what the other students talk about, they tend not to fully participate and exclude themselves. This condition leads to assumption that they have not been able yet to adapt to the new culture. Therefore, it is difficult for the teacher to approach them since it seems that they have no intention on involving themselves actively during the class. Problems related to personal cultural clash for example low self-confidence, inability to adapt to new culture, and feeling homesick are considered factors that may distract the successful of multicultural classroom (Croese, 2011; Kourieos & Evripidou, 2013).

The teacher concerning the aspects of teaching learning process should make all those problems result in some adjustment. First, in term of giving instruction in the classroom, the teacher cannot only use English or Indonesian language, but also to utilize some gestures to make the instruction clearer. Second, the teacher used many visual aids as teaching assistance. Asking the students to merely have discussion in the classroom will widen the interaction gap between



host and foreign students. Instead of explaining the material or giving examples verbally, use more vivid media helped them understand the meaning better. Later, it effects on the change of teaching strategies. What kind of material, how to deliver it, how they would learn it, and in what way the students are directed are some considerations should take into account before, even while teaching English in multicultural classroom with students from non-English speaking country (Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014; Hansen-thomas & Chennapragada, 2018; Premier & Miller, 2010; Short, 1974).

In other words, it can be said that teaching English in non-English speaking country require more considerations of the teacher in order to provide a situation where all students are facilitated in the classroom. Teacher's ability to guide and lead the students in spite of their diversity is the first thing to consider if the institution embraces the international students. Therefore, the synergy of the institution and the teacher regarding the multicultural policy should be prominent.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

From the elaboration of reflection above, the conclusion is as follow. Multicultural classroom is a small educational setting consists of students coming from different countries. It should provide the students a wider range of knowledge by embracing the diversity. Thus, teaching English in multicultural classroom is challenging, especially when the foreign students do not come from English speaking country. As what mentioned before, language barrier is one of the most common issues in multicultural classroom. As the results, teacher faces many problems and issues regarding cultural involvement, especially in term of language barrier. Later on, it effects on how the teacher provide the learning activities for the students. In this case, regarding the way of teaching, the teacher needs to adjust her current teaching in order to facilitate both students even though it does not an easy task to do.

Suggestion



For nowadays trends, having multicultural classroom in a university is not a new thing. However, some conditions should be considered by involved parties such as the institution, teacher, and the students regarding the cultural differences that might affect the learning process and achievement. Some of them are regarding the language, enrollment requirement, and so on. Therefore, it is suggested that making thorough preparation before managing the multicultural classroom is prominent for the institution, the teacher, and even the prospective students.



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