

TEACHER APPROACHES TO TEACHING A LARGE EFL CLASS

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ABSTRACT

This research was aimed to identify problems faced by an English teacher in managing a large class and to describe strategies the teacher employed for that purpose. It was conducted at a vocational school in Banyumas Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. Descriptive qualitative approach was used in the study, with interview and observation as the main data collection techniques. One English teacher was involved as the research participant. Based on the interview with the English teacher, three difficulties arose when handling the large EFL classes: student grouping, use of English as language of instruction, and active student learning. Strategies the English teacher used in dealing with the large classes included: arranging seat position, grouping students, using appropriate media, controlling students, inserting humors, creating interactions, managing time, mentioning prohibition, telling stories, singing songs, and imposing punishment. In regard with strategies of handling EFL large size classes, the authors suggest a few other strategies for this purpose emerged from previous research experience.

Key words: teacher strategies, large classroom, EFL, classroom management

INTRODUCTION

A well-known and persistent problem with teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) throughout Asia and in many parts of the world is the large size of classes. Even though teaching English in high schools to most teachers is interesting and fun, in practice it is complicated and is energy consuming. For the sake of a better education system, strategies in teaching English language to teenagers in schools have to be adopted by the teacher. The purpose of teaching learning process is to make students get new knowledge

and be able to understand the knowledge. To achieve the purpose of teaching, the teacher should be creative in choosing the materials and strategies of teaching in order to make students understand the knowledge easily. Besides that, teachers should have various skill in teaching their students. One of the most important skills that teachers should have in teaching and learning process is the ability to manage the classroom.

Djamarah and Zain (2010: 39) state that among the roles of teacher, the most important one is that as a manager. Teachers should be able to manage classes well and provide conditions that enable students to learn in order to obtain the expected results. If teachers cannot manage the classrooms properly, teaching and learning process would not run effectively.

Teachers play a crucial role in classrooms as a leader of instruction. To fulfill that role, teachers should pay attention to the students' social background, students' capacities and classroom facilities, in such a way that they can execute their role appropriately. Besides that, teachers must be able to control and overcome if there are disruptions in the classroom. Thus, it can be concluded that the most important thing in teaching and learning process is classroom management. Classroom management is one factor that contributes and determines students' learning outcomes. Students will feel comfortable with the situation of the class. Convenient classes are not only determined by how nice and neat the classroom is, but also by how teachers perform in the lessons. Mastering the classroom when teaching is necessary, because teachers who master classes well will be able to make learners easily capture the material. It is the reason why the effectiveness of classroom management is required in teaching and learning process.

From the description above, it is apparent how important a classroom management is in the success of the learning objectives. This is also the basic skill that the teachers have to master to improve students learning activities. As stated by Foutz in Rahman et al (2010: 97) an effective classroom management begins with the teacher. The teacher should plan all of the things well. It means that the teacher has to know how to begin and end the activities, what the needs in teaching learning process are, what kind of instruction are given by the teacher, how to prevent the problems that appear in learning process and how to control students, so that the learning condition will be constantly optimal. Unfortunately, not all teachers are able to manage their

classes well, especially large classes. Many teachers assume that a large class is one of the main obstacles to implement effective learning. As happened at a vocational high school – SMK Karya Teknologi 1 Jatilawang, Banyumas, Indonesia, the English teacher encountered some problems in teaching English to students in a large classroom there. While the fact is that the educational institution has been one of favorite schools in the area. The school student population is 600 comprising 32 classes with number of students per class ranging from 47 to 55, making up big classes.

METHOD

This research belongs to a case study research. Case study is the research method mainly used social sciences (Yin: 2011:1). Bassey (1999: 26) points out that a case study is generic term for the investigation of an individual, group or phenomenon. Case study begins with questions as to “why” and or “how”. Meanwhile, this study deals with the “how” question, that is, how does the English teacher manage the large classes. This study investigated one English teacher.

According to Suwartono (2014: 124-125) the research participant of a case study research could be individual, institution, or group. Individual case study has more revealing power than those involving groups. It is because each individual has a uniqueness, with various complexity. The uniqueness found in this research was in terms of place and participant. The research participant involved in this research was an English teacher named Subur Setiawan. He graduated from a reputed local higher educational institution – Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto and has been teaching at the vocational school since 2010. He teaches the first, second, and third grade students.

This study used interview and observation as main methods of data collection. The researcher used semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interview made the researcher become more flexible in managing the time and getting the information (Suwartono: 2014: 49). Meanwhile for the observation the researcher used non-participant observation. The researchers conducted the observation for four times at that school. The interview was given to the English teacher to identify the difficulties faced by English teacher and to reveal the strategy used by English teacher in managing large classes. In

analyzing the data there were three steps that were implemented in this research namely: data reduction, data displayed, and drawing conclusion.

The methods used in conveying learning materials are lecture, question-answer, discussion and practice including practice using multimedia tools such as laptops, LCDs, printers and properties (whiteboards, drawings, cards). The teacher used some strategies in handling the large classes.

Strategies the English teacher used in dealing with the large classes covered special efforts in: arranging seat position, grouping students, using media, controlling students, inserting humors, creating interactions, managing time, mentioning prohibition, telling stories, singing songs, and imposing punishment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted at a vocational high school – SMK Karya Teknologi 1 Jatilawang in Banyumas Regency, Central Java, Indonesia.. The research participant was an English teacher working at the school. The aim of this research was to identify the problems faced by the teacher in managing the big classes at the school and to describe strategies employed when handling the lessons.

Based on the interview and observation, the researcher concluded that there were three difficulties faced by the English teacher and two different strategies have been applied by the English teacher in managing large classes. The difficulties that the teacher faced in managing the large classes were: student grouping, use of English as language of instruction, and student-centered learning. Whereas strategies the English teacher employed in dealing with the large classes included: arranging seat position, grouping students, using media, controlling students, inserting humors, creating interactions, managing time, mentioning prohibition, telling stories, singing songs, and imposing punishment.

A. The problems encountered by the English teacher in managing large classes

Based on the findings, the researcher found three main difficulties faced by the English teacher in dealing with the large classes. The first was difficulty in grouping the students, then using English as medium of

instructional language in the class, and creating student-centered learning. These concerns are discussed in more detailed below:

1. Student grouping issue

The teacher found the difficulties when implementing the recent national curriculum, the so-called Curriculum 2013, in English teaching and learning process in this case in large classes. The teacher found it difficult to divide the students into groups because the number of students was too large. Besides that, all the students were males who were relatively more difficult to control. As stated by the teacher in an interview, at times he found problems such as when grouping students.

In regard with the teacher's comment, he was in trouble implementing the curriculum's English language teaching in large classes because, as he believed, in implementing the current curriculum, students have to be active usually by going through team works to discuss some task. However, it was difficult for the teacher to manage them in group works, since there were too many students there. Besides that, typically the students were also reluctant to move or leave their seats to work together, since they tended or preferred to work with a friend sitting nearby only.

2. English as language instruction issue

The teacher found it difficult to use English for communication while teaching in the large classes. The teacher still spoke Indonesian language when he taught English in large classes because most students were still confused and did not understand what the teacher was saying when he spoke English while delivering the material. Due to this problem, the use of English was considered to have hindered rather than helped the teaching and learning.

It was likely that most students still lacked of vocabulary and were not accustomed to using English in their daily life. As a result, the teacher mixed English and the Indonesian language. In most cases, the teacher repeated his instruction a few times because the instruction was in English and then the teacher translated it into the Indonesian language to let the students understand instructions and do the task as expected.

3. Active student learning issue

The teacher was concerned about the students who did not participate in the lessons. Most students did not seem to be self-confident and seemed to worry about and feel afraid of making mistakes. Another most possible reason was that majority of students still lacked vocabulary. Those altogether led to the uncondusive situation in which students were not active in learning process.

B. Strategies employed by English teacher in managing the large classes

1. Seating arrangements

In implementing curriculum 13 students have to be active by working in a group to discuss some tasks. Therefore, at the beginning of learning process the teacher arranged the students' seat position. He arranged the students' position like changing the students' position from the backside moved to the front, the front to the backside, the left to the right, and the right to the left. Sometimes, the teacher changed student's peer. This strategy was applied to make the students not feel bored with their seat position and encouraged students to learn better. They experienced different atmosphere as they move their seat position. They discussed not only to their close friends but also to other classmates.

Seating arrangement done by the teacher above only moved the students' seating position since the students' seats here have been arranged and locked or connected with the others seats in a row. It was difficult to move the seats for the seats were made of wood so that it would take time and energy to move them. It would be easier for the teacher when the classroom is provided by the folding chairs. Therefore, researchers suggested some other strategies that can be implemented in teaching EFL in a large classroom regarding to this namely seating arrangement patterns. They are:

- a. Seating pattern with horseshoe formation. In this pattern, the position of the teacher was in the midst of the students. The students can move their folding chairs in the form of half circle. This pattern makes teacher and students easy in consulting and communicating.

- b. Seating pattern forming round or square table. This kind of arrangement is good for teaching when presented with discussion. The formation form is round or square. Teacher divides the class into small groups then they gather and move their chairs forming full circle or square. Students could communicate easily with each other and could move from one group to another indefinitely. It makes easier for students to work together and help each other. Unlike the horseshoe pattern, teacher authority is not at all obedient and formal leadership does not play a role at all.

2. Grouping students

Group work can be interpreted as a teaching and learning activity where students in a class are guided as a group or divided into small groups to achieve a particular teaching goal. In this research, the teacher used grouping to improve the students' vocabulary. In grouping the students, the teacher used different ways in every meeting. First, he divided students into groups with members who have equal abilities and then he gave assignments according to their abilities. The teacher took turns to see which groups needed help or full attention. Second, he prepared lottery which contained the topic, numbers, part of speech, and etc. Then the students chose the lottery that has been prepared before. Students with the same topic would work in one group. Another way that he used for grouping the students was by counting and mixing the students' list.

Strategies applied by the teacher above created weaknesses like students' reluctance to take part in discussions because they were not interested in the topic being studied. To overcome this problem, the researchers suggested one strategy that can be implemented namely grouping on the basis of differences in learning interest. In this strategy, students get the opportunity to choose a subject that suit their interests. For this purpose the teacher provides a subject which consists of several sub topics. Students who are interested gathered in a group to study the sub-topic in question.

3. Using appropriate media

The media used in this study were teaching aids, namely tools used to demonstrate (manifest) everything that was explained so that students can see for themselves and / or hear. In this research, the teacher used power point and students' worksheet (LKS). He made some slides of explanation in the form of power points to attract students' interest. He was assisted by the visual media which was projected on the screen, through a projector, in order to interact with students.

But a problem may arise when the electricity is off or when the projector is broken. When it happens, one solution is by applying a new strategy but still deals with using media, namely visual media that is not projected. This media is very simple, it does not need a projector. Included in this type are: pictures, illustrations, posters, and sketches. When describing grammar about present progressive tense, for example, the teacher can use images that describe a family which is carrying out several activities in the morning. From the picture, students are asked to tell the occurring activities using the present progressive tense.

4. Controlling students

The way to control the students was by watching and controlling them from all sides. The teacher controlled the students by using eye contact and his gesture. In teaching EFL the teacher not only stayed in front of the class, but the teacher also walked around of the class to control the class during the learning process. Sometimes, the teacher also stayed in the middle of class to control the students.

Only using hand movements and eye contact in controlling the class as the teacher did in this study still created a noise made by some students. Other strategies can be applied, for example by approaching directly to students who make noise and do physical touches such as tapping students' shoulders.

5. Inserting humors

Using humor is one of the interesting strategy to break the ice so that the students do not feel bored and anxious when they are studying English. The teacher knew that the students always like jokes. So he made a joke as an ice breaker. As the observation done during the research, when the students did not understand about the material, jokes cheered up the students and refreshed their mind so that they can concentrate to the lesson. The teacher did it because he wanted to make the students think that learning English is actually fun.

The problem will arise when the teacher is lack of humor while the class is not conducive anymore. A new strategy is needed that is by playing a short funny movie to the students using the projector. The teacher may prepare the funny movie which has short duration (about 3 or 5 minutes) before entering the class. So, when in the middle of the activity students look bored, teacher can break the lesson for a while, then show the movie to them.

6. Creating interactions

The teacher always try to communicate with the students. The teacher always asked the students to repeat the sentence after the teacher. Based on interview, he explained that using K13 the students should be more active in speaking in the learning process. Asking and answering questions with students was one of the strategies that he applied to make the students have critical thinking skill. Another strategy to build students' interaction was by having dialog between teacher and students, and dialog among the students themselves.

From the strategies applied above, it can be concluded that the teacher successfully applied two interaction patterns, they were:

a. Pattern between teacher-student

The teacher gave questions to the entire class, then after there was an answer from the students, it was given back to other students to get a response.

b. Pattern between students

Students worked in small groups, exchanged opinions or discussions without teacher intervention.

7. Managing time

The teacher applied 2 strategies for managing the time. First, the teacher used first time for teacher talking time (TTT), and the second time for the students talking time (STT). Firstly, teacher tried to deliver the material clearly. The teacher divided the time in order to make the students active and independent in learning process. Then, teacher gave time for students to ask and/or answer the questions, to state their opinions, and to conclude what the teacher already explained.

In practice, the time for teacher talking was usually more than the time for students talking, or vice versa. In order to be more controlled, it is better before implementing this strategy there is an agreement between teacher and students at the beginning. For example, the teacher can say at the beginning of the meeting that he will explain the material for 45 minutes and the student will have the opportunity to speak for 55 minutes. By using a wall clock in the classroom, this time management can be controlled well.

8. Mentioning prohibitions

The teacher gave prohibition to the students. During the research, the teacher prohibited the students not to use electronic dictionary from their cell phone during the learning process. When they needed the dictionary to do the task they could open the dictionary book since the school provides the student with that facility. Thus irresponsible acts such as using internet for unnecessary things, such as playing game or opening social media, can be avoided. Another purpose why this strategy was applied is that the teacher wished his students like reading better, such as reading dictionary when they wanted to find the meaning of words or translated the words or sentences.

From the research finding, the researchers agreed that prohibition should be given so students were disciplined in conducting learning activities in the classroom. The prohibition could be manifested in two forms of reinforcement, namely:

a. Verbal reinforcement

Prohibition is said directly to students who break the rules, for example, in one learning session students are prohibited from opening the dictionary, if there is a student who opens the dictionary then the teacher can say directly "Please, do not open your dictionary!"

b. Non-verbal reinforcement

Strengthening is given in the form of mimic and body movements such as head shake, or hand movements towards the teacher's mouth meaning that students are not allowed to speak loudly in the classroom.

9. Telling stories and Singing songs

The students were always easier to feel bored. Therefore, the teacher did things that made students feel not bored and sleepy. The teacher made the situation become more enjoyable by singing and telling the story in order to make the students did not feel bored in learning

From the finding above, the teacher used songs and stories for making the classroom to be more alive. However the strategy was not always used in every meeting, it was only used when the class was not conducive or when the students needed motivation and something different. The teacher sang an English song that was popular and the students liked the song. It changed the students' mood and made them feel interested with the lesson.

10. Imposing punishment

Giving penalty was a strategy used to make students discipline in order to not break the rules that were already agreed. The teacher stated as follows: "I asked the students to remember a text or clean up the room when they did not do their task or asked them to do their homework in separate seat when they did not finish their homework at home".

According to teacher's explanation above, the penalty that were given to the students must be reasonable and educating. That penalty was given to the students in order that they knew or understood about the mistake they had done. Some penalties were

given to the students who broke the rules, such as asking the students to get out of the class if they were caught eating food in the classroom or requiring the students to do their homework in back seats in the classroom when they did not do their homework. The teacher ordered the students to stand in front of the class about 15 minutes if they came late to the class. The penalty was given by the teacher not to make students afraid, but it was aimed to give deterrent effect so that students will not repeat the same mistake in the future.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result of interview and observation in the study, there were three difficulties faced by the teacher in managing large classes, namely: grouping the students, using English in learning process, and making students active in learning process. There were ten strategies that were used by the teacher to manage large classes namely: First, the teacher arranged the students seating position. Second grouping the students. Third, the teacher used the media. Fourth the teacher controlled the students. Fifth the teacher used humor in learning process and then he tried to interact with the students. In additional the teacher set the time management in learning process. On the other hand the teacher also prohibited the students not to use cell phone whether it was for looking vocabulary or translating a text. Then, the teacher used storytelling and singing to dismiss students' boredom during the learning process. At last teacher also gave penalty to the students who broke the rules. By using those strategies the teacher could manage his large class well, made students get and understand the material well then caught the students' interest and attention in learning process.

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