ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES IN TEACHING CROSS CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING FOR ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS

Ikke Dewi Pratama
English Education Department, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training,
IAIN Surakarta, Indonesia
ikkepratama89@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Cross Cultural Understanding (CCU) is one of required courses in English Language Teaching which aims at connecting language and culture so that language learners can use foreign language appropriately, i.e. appropriate forms of language for appropriate context of situation. However, some obstacles usually occur during the course, for examples: students' lack of understanding that lead to opinions stating that this is a boring and useless course, and large number of students within a class where lecturer must teach more than 40 students in one class. Considering the importance of CCU course as well as the needs to overcome the problems during this course, this paper proposes some particular teaching strategies to help students in apprehending CCU materials through students' active participations. Active learning strategies are preferred by means of raising students' participation and critical thinking so that the class would run more effectively. Other consideration in composing the strategies is to prepare English Education students to be future English language teachers by training their ability in teaching performance as well as connecting language and culture in English Language Teaching (ELT).

Keywords: *language, culture, strategies, media, ELT*

I. INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are two interrelated aspects that cannot be separated. In the case of teaching and learning English as a foreign language, cross cultural understanding becomes one of the most important aspects that must be recognized by language learners. Sugirin (2009:1) states that for the success of English Language Teaching (ELT), the teachers must have good understanding of the Indonesian cultures and qualified competencies of English as well as the cultures of English speakers. One of the ways in balancing students' competencies in both language and culture, especially those learning English as a foreign language, is by giving Cross Cultural Understanding (CCU) course. For the students of English Education Department, the insight of cross cultural understanding would be very crucial

as they would also be English teachers giving lessons about English language and culture in the future. Furthermore, by understanding both the language and the culture, the language learners would be able to use foreign language appropriately, i.e. the ability of using foreign language based on the grammatical rules as well as the context of situation.

Considering the aforementioned needs, creating conducive and interactive classroom setting would be a good strategy to enhance students' understanding and invite students' excitement toward the course. In order to establish these kinds of situations, active learning strategies equipped with integrated steps would be potentially advantageous. By using active learning strategies, students would not only be considered as the receivers. Furthermore, the classroom activities provided by the lecturers would not be monotonous where lecturers are considered as the central of information (the senders).

This paper proposes some active learning strategies in teaching cross cultural understanding for the students of English Education Department. The main purpose of these strategies is to give understanding about the importance of cross cultural understanding for ELT. Other purposes are correlated with teaching skills, i.e. to train students' ability in delivering materials and encourage students' creativity in creating classroom activities with cross cultural understanding aspect on it. Establishing these purposes hopefully would also be beneficial in preparing the students' role as future English teachers.

Active Learning Strategies: An Innovative Method of Teaching

In the development of teaching theory, traditional method of teaching or "one way flow" teaching method has been criticized by many experts. It is believed that in "one way flow" teaching, in which the lecturer's role is as the sender and the student' role is as the receiver, students accept a merely passive role and their concentration fades off after 15-20 minutes

(Dhamodharan & Rengarajan)[1]. Thus, traditional method is considered less effective mean of teaching. On the other hand, the rapid development of technology should influences lecturers' way of teaching. Making use of many kinds of technology-based media, such as blog, youtube.com, etc; could also increase students' participation towards the course.

Active learning strategies are innovative solutions to increase the teaching-learning quality. Prince (2004:1) states that active learning are instructional teaching methods that involve students in the learning process. Furthermore, Farrell (2013) elaborates that these strategies include focusing activities on cooperative structures to active involvement of thinking processes in the learning and application of knowledge.[2] In active learning strategies, students are asked to think about the correlation between the learning activities and the topic of discussion. Thus, the role of the teachers or lecturers is not only as the coach or mentor. Indeed, lecturers are the facilitator and motivator engaging students in various activities as active participants responsible for their own learning (Karwar, 2014:279).

There are some popular active learning strategies, such as think-pair-share, reading aloud, jigsaw discussion, small group discussion, etc. These strategies are possible to be modified based on the course that the lecturers and the students are engaged on. The modification of the basic strategies would result on innovative methods of teaching that are potential to encourage students' understanding and excitement towards the course. In greater impacts, involving students as the main aspect in teaching-learning activities would persuade students' responsibility and independency in their learning habit. Besides, it would also stimulate students' critical thinking and problem solving skills that would also be useful for them in facing various problems in society.

---

[1] Dhamodharan & Rengarajan. Innovative Methods of Teaching. Web math.arizona.edu/~atpmena/conference/proceedings/Damodharan_Innovative_Methods.pdf ., accessed on January 2016.

[2] Farrell, Jill B. (2013). Active Learning: Theories and Research. Web www.lookstein.org/online_journal.php?id=260, accessed on October 29, 2013.

The Media of Active Learning for Teaching Cross Cultural Understanding

In modern era, books are not the main resources in teaching-learning activity. Making use of some other media and collaborate them with suitable strategies would result in interesting classroom activity. The following are some media that can be used in teaching CCU:

1. **News article or short story**

      Many topics of discussion in CCU course are based on real life, for examples: stereotypes, culture shock, male female relationship, etc. However, it is possible that students have not been aware about the types of the cases. For instance, the issue of terrorism that leads to stereotype or the dinning etiquettes that lead to certain table manner customs in some parts of the world. As the cases have actually been familiar for the students, applying Z to A approach using news article or short story illustration as the media would be an interesting activity. Lecturer may give article or short story to students and let them discuss the cultural problems. The discussion would finally guide the students' understanding to the main topic.

      Using internet search engine, such as google.com, yahoo.com, etc would help lecturers in finding the articles as well as short stories. News articles are in the form of factual events happen in the society which have correlation with cultural issues. For examples, the articles telling about the experience of some American popular celebrities when they visited Europe that will lead to the discussion of culture shock.[3] Meanwhile, short stories refer to the illustration of cultural differences presented in short fictive stories. Some of short stories that can be used in CCU class are entitled "Fast Food" and "College Roommates" which explore various aspects of cultural differences.[4]

2. **Video**

---

[3] www.knowable.com/a/24-americans-share-their-biggest-culture-shock-experience-after-visiting-europe

[4] http://www.culture-at-work.com/ex1samples.html

As stated above, in current era, internet provides lecturer with various innovative learning media that can be used in teaching activity. Besides google.com and yahoo.com, another website that can be used is youtube.com that provides us with various videos, either factual or fictional, related to cross cultural understanding.

Providing students with videos can be an effective way to stimulate students' understanding through visual materials. Visual literacy can be a crucial media in helping students to obtain information, construct knowledge and build education outcomes (Bamford, 2003:2). This statement reflects that with the help of visual literacy, including moving scenes or video on it, it is expected that students would get more concrete description about the issues they learned. In this case, Bonk (2008:15) states that humorous, informative, current, interesting, and engaging videos are preferred by students.

Typing the keywords on the search column would directly give lecturer numerous videos related to cross cultural understanding. Some of the videos that can be searched through youtube.com are entitled "Blindfolded Muslim man with sign "Do you trust me?" hugs hundreds in Paris" and "Language and Culture".

Besides short videos as stated before, several movies may also give illustration about the importance of cross cultural understanding in international communication, for example "99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa", "Karate Kids", "Lost in Translation", and "Anna and the King". However, Duffy (2008:124-125) recommends that the video used in classroom should be short and should not be passive. Short-time video would keep the students' concentration by providing simple but meaningful material. Meanwhile, the video used should not be passive means that the lecturer must be able to operate the video player, such as: pause, repeat, cut, etc; so that the content of the video will encourage students' critical thinking and activeness in the discussion. Thus, it would be better that the use of movie in classroom activity should be organized in some particular ways in order to keep students'

activeness. One of the ways in attempting this objective is by cutting or pausing the movie in some crucial scenes reflecting cross cultural differences.

3. **Picture**

Besides video (moving scenes), printed picture can also be a choice in teaching cross cultural understanding. The lecturer needs to provide some pictures illustrating cultural issues and ask students to discuss the cultural issues by analyzing the pictures. One of the pictures reflecting this media use is the illustration of Top 10 Differences of Western and Eastern Cultures.[5]

4. **Blog**

In order to facilitate students with tasks encouraging their active participation as well as critical thinking ability, lecturer may create blog, or any other forms of online discussion, and post cases related to language and cultural issues. Students would later on be asked to have discussion by posting ideas on the comment box. Besides encouraging students' critical thinking, Duff (2008:122) explains that blog can stimulate students to take creative risks and make sophisticated use of language and design elements. In other words, blog can be a good medium in giving students unimpeded time to contemplate a particular case given by the lecturer by using various ways, i.e. students can build their opinions by reading books or articles from internet, having discussion, etc.

II. DISCUSSION

Active Learning Strategies for Teaching Cross Cultural Understanding

In order to create more active and exciting atmosphere in classroom, the activities are divided into two: theory and project. In the theory session, the students learn theories related to cross cultural understanding using various discussion strategies. Meanwhile, in the project session, the students correlate some or all of the theories and compose it into a performance, practice, or

---

[5] http://topyaps.com/top-10-differences-between-eastern-and-western-cultures

paper. Below are some active learning strategies in teaching cross cultural understanding for both classroom activities:

1. **Types of Discussion Strategies in the Theory Session**

    The importance of cross cultural understanding for ELT students and teachers is one of the most crucial theory in this session. Understanding "what", "why", and "how" to learn cross cultural understanding is possibly the first important material to be understood by the students. Other cross cultural understanding theories that can be taught to students are, for examples, types of general American values, stereotypes, cultural conflicts, non-verbal language, table manner, etc (Pujiyanti & Zuliani, 2014). Some of discussion strategies in teaching in the theory session of CCU course are as follows:

    a. **Critical Incidents**

        Critical incidents are done by giving general questions related to the topic of discussion. This is a suitable strategy to be applied in the beginning of the course as lecturer would stimulate students' thinking and activeness since the very beginning of the course (Zaini, et al, 2013:2). For example, in the discussion of Language and Culture, lecturer may ask about students' experience when they have conversation with native speaker or when they need to translate a text from English into Indonesian, or vice versa. After receiving comments from the students, the lecturer may correlate one comment to other comments and then develop them into the next questions. The comments and questions would then lead to the topic of the discussion.

    b. **Small Group Discussion**

        Occasionally, lecturer has to handle more than 40 students in a class which is considered as "big" class and less effective class. Small group discussion could be one of the most appropriate strategies in solving this problem. Providing reading material that can be divided into several subchapters are suitable in applying small group discussion, for example in the discussion of Types of General American Values. The class is divided into several small groups and each group

should be responsible for discussing one or two subchapter within particular time, for example 20 minutes. The next activity is each group must assign one member as the representative of the group to explain the subchapter they have discussed in front of the other students.

Small group discussion is an appropriate way for training students' competence in teaching performance. Different from the previous strategy, in small group discussion, students are asked to share their understanding to their friends. This activity would train their ability in teaching performance, including explaining materials to others, handling class activity, giving feedback to comments and answering other students' questions.

c. **Jigsaw Learning**

Small group discussion can be modified into jigsaw learning. Similar to small group discussion, the class is divided into several small groups responsible for discussing particular subchapter within particular time. However, the responsibility for explaining the materials would not only be given to one student of each group but to all group members. Therefore, after the discussion in small group session, each group would assign its representatives to other groups to explain the material they had discussed before. Jigsaw learning requires deep understanding of each group member as they would not only learn for themselves but also for teaching other students (Zaini, et al, 2013:59).

d. **Metaplano Session (Learning through Picture Illustrations)**

Creating innovative media can be a good stimulation in raising students' excitement towards the course. In metaplano session, the lecturer provides pictures as the media that illustrate cultural issues. For example, in the discussion of Non-Verbal Languages, within small groups of discussion, the lecturer gives each group several pictures of hand movements or facial expressions. The next activity is asking students to search information about the meanings of those hand movements or facial expression, through books or internet, which might be different in some countries. Students write the results of their

discussion in a wide paper (so that it could be read by other students), glue the pictures on the paper, and explain it to other students.

e. **Online Discussion**

One of the purposes of active learning strategies is to avoid students' passiveness during the course. However, although some active learning strategies have been applied in classroom activity, there are still some students who are still considered as passive participants. In order to encourage passive students to be active in class, lecturer may use online discussion strategies. Nowadays, online discussion as a mean of teaching-learning strategy is widely used in higher education. Online discussion aims at maintaining students' participation when the class is over or has not been started. Consequently, students need to study and be active although they are not in class.

As discussed in the previous part of this paper, using blog can be an effective medium in making use of technology for teaching-learning activity. Asking all students to give comments related to the cultural issues posted by the lecturer would be an effective way to rouse the passive students' motivation. Comments by the passive students should be discussed in class by first asking them to elucidate their opinions. Through the help of online discussion, passive students would learn to train their public speaking ability that can be developed into appropriate teaching performance.

2. **Project Session**

The second classroom activity is conducted in the form of project session. In project session, the students need to comprehend the theories to perform particular project related to cross cultural understanding. Some strategies in conducting the project session are as follows:

a. **Cultural Party**

In cultural party project, students are asked to perform the customs of several countries in the form of an exhibition. The lecturer divides the class into several groups. Countries with popular cultures can be chosen to be performed by each group, for example: China,

India, Korea, Arab, etc. The lecturer gives freedom to the students to decide what kinds of customs they want to perform. Several customs that could be preferences are national costume, greeting custom, traditional foods, wedding ceremony, table manner, common misunderstanding in international communication, etc. During the cultural party, one student, or more, of each group should be the master of ceremony conducting the performance of his or her group. Cultural party could be a project comprehending students' understanding about language and culture, creativity, and public speaking ability. It would also promote fun learning activity in CCU course.

Figure 1: Cultural Party Project in Cross Cultural Understanding Course

b. Lesson Plan with Cross Cultural Understanding Contents

Preparing students to be a well-prepared future English teachers usually becomes one of the most important missions for some English Education Departments. Besides forming the habit of public speaking activity, another skill that can be trained is asking students to be creative in composing lesson plan. The project of composing lesson plan with cross cultural understanding contents can be given to students in order to assess their ability in correlating language comprehension and culture.

Some examples of comprehending cross cultural understanding in teaching English are illustrated as follows:

1) Teaching Reading Skill

   The teacher uses text containing cultural issue such as Thanksgiving. By reading the text, students would also learn about Thanksgiving culture that does not exist in Indonesia.

2) Teaching Listening Skill

   The teacher can make use of audio discussing about American and European table manners. The students are then asked to identify the differences between those table manners. This activity also introduces students with international dinning etiquettes.

3) Teaching Speaking Skill

   In discussing English greeting, the teacher can explain the difference between *Good night* and *Good evening* in greeting custom for English native speakers.

Integrating cross cultural understanding in English lesson as illustrated above can be done in two modes, explicit mode and implicit mode (Sugirin, 2009:9). In explicit mode, teacher uses prepared materials as parts of their instructional materials to introduce cultures. Meanwhile, in implicit mode, teacher can make use of any possible materials to introduce cultures as hidden syllabus. These theories can be introduced to students first before asking them to compose the lesson plan. Later on, the lecturer assign several students with best lesson plans to perform the micro teaching session in front of other students.

c. **Cross Cultural Understanding Video**

Composing video related to cross cultural understanding can also be an innovative task to raise students' creativity as well as to assess their ability in understanding cross cultural understanding materials. In groups, students are asked to compose short scenario about the importance of cross cultural understanding in international

communication and then conduct a video shooting session played by the students.

Later on, the lecturer can also make use of video sharing website, such as youtube.com, to publicize the works of the students via internet. The publication of students' video project through internet show the attempt of the lecturer to make use of newly developed technology, i.e. the use of youtube.com not only as the source of obtaining instructional videos but also as the media to share students' tasks (Duffy, 2008:124). This can also be an appropriate way to raise students' motivation in conducting the project.

d. Table Manner Practicum

The discussion of table manner can be brought into a project asking the students to practice the table manner custom of particular country. This session can be done in a hotel or a restaurant providing us with the tools and the menu, or in an independent way where students prepare the tools and the menu by themselves then practice the table manner in class. The practicum would be preceded with students' presentation about the table manner custom. Thus, before the practicum session, students need to learn first about the dinning etiquette of given country. This activity is a good way in creating active and fun learning for the students.

Figure 2: Table Manner Project in Cross Cultural Understanding Course

III. CONCLUSION

Every single class has its own unique characteristic. Monotonous atmosphere with one way teaching would invite students' passiveness and boredom during the class. In this case, lecturer's creativity is needed in composing fun activities. Furthermore, stimulating students' participation and critical thinking through active learning is very crucial in teaching-learning activity. Active learning strategies focus on the participation of the students while assign the lecturer as the facilitator. Conducting active learning in classroom hopefully would help students in understanding the courses through activities involving them as the center of information. Thus, independency and critical thinking are trained during the courses.

There are some media for conducting active learning in CCU class proposed in this paper. They are news article or short story, video, picture, and blog. The use of those media can be combined with various forms of active learning strategies. This paper proposed two sessions of classroom activity: theory session and project session. In the theory session, the discussion strategy is modified into some types of discussion, including: critical incidents, small group discussion, jigsaw learning, metaplano session, and online discussion. The project session explores students' understanding towards the course by performing it in the form of cultural party, lesson plan composition, CCU video, and table manner practicum.

Hopefully, this conceptual ideas can help lecturer in creating fun and active learning activities in CCU course, or in other courses as well. Specifically for English Education students, the above strategies are also designed based on the needs in preparing the students to be English teachers in the future. However, the writer believes that there is no one permanent teaching strategy for particular course. Thus, the aforementioned strategies can also be combined with other strategies, as well as modified, in order to create more successful atmosphere based on the purposes of the course.

REFERENCES

Bamford. (2003). The visual literacy white paper. *Adobe systems Pty Ltd., Australia.* Web www.adobe.co.uk/education/pdf/adobe_visual_literacy_paper.pdf., accessed on August 2016

Bonk, C.J. (2008). Youtube anchors and enders: The use of shared online video content as a macrocontext for learning. *Asia-Pacific collaborative education journal, Volume 7, Number 1, 2011,* pp. 13 – 24.

Dhamodharan & Rengarajan. *Innovative methods of teaching.* Web math.arizona.edu/~atpmena/conference/proceedings/Damodharan_Innovative_Methods.pdf., accessed on January 2016.

Duffy. (2008). Engaging the youtube google-eyed generation: strategies for using web 2.0 in teaching and learning. *The electronic journal of e-learning volume 6 issue 2*, pp. 119 – 130. Web www.ejel.org, accessed on August 2016.

Farrell, Jill B. (2013). *Active learning: theories and research.* Web www.lookstein.org/online_journal.php?id=260, accessed on October 29, 2013.

Karwar, A.K. (2014). Innovative teaching and learning as a best practice in an educational system. *Research front, No.1 January 2014,* pp. 277-280.

Prince, Michael. (2004). Does active learning work? a review of the research. *Journal of engineering education*, 93(3), 223-231.

Pujiyanti & Zuliani. (2014). *Cross cultural understanding: A handbook to understand other' cultures*. Yogyakarta: CV. Hidayah.

Sugirin. (2009). Cross cultural understanding: What every efl teachers should know. *Paper presented in Short Lecture of Cross Cultural Understanding for High School English Teacher Working Group in Purworejo,* 30 October 2009.

Zaini, H, Muthe, B, & Aryani, S.A. (2013). *Strategi Pembelajaran Aktif*. Yogyakarta: Center for Teaching Staff Development UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta.