THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION TECHNIQUE IN TEACHING READING ANALYTICAL EXPOSITION TEXT

Anna Mardiyah

English Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, State University of Surabaya
amardiyah34@yahoo.com

Fauris Zuhri, S.Pd., M.Hum.

English Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, State University of Surabaya
fauris.zuhri@ymail.com

Esti Kurniasih, S.pd., M.Pd.

English Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, State University of Surabaya
Estikurniasih87@yahoo.com

Abstract

Classroom reading activities are essential is EFL learning. In reading, there is a process of receiving knowledge and information. As a receptive skill, reading is meant to prepare the learners with sufficient information before proceeding to the production of the language. However, reading is often considered as a passive activity. Many teachers nowadays put the focus on the production of the language which, in their opinion, truly shows the success of the learning process.

In this qualitative study, the researcher observes a teacher implementing Small Group Discussion in teaching reading analytical exposition text. This teaching technique allows the students to work in small groups, exchange ideas, and learn from the others in the same group.

The result shows that the teacher did not fully follow the theories given by experts. However, the teacher manages to successfully implement the teaching technique. Also, the students have positive responses on the implementation of Small Group Discussion.

Small Group Discussion is not limited to be implemented only for reading activities. Individually or integrated, this teaching technique can be implemented to any language skill in any language classroom activity. The implementation will be considered successful if it matches with the material and meets the students' needs.

Keywords: Small Group Discussion, Teaching Reading, Analytical Exposition

INTRODUCTION

Many studies on English language teaching in Indonesia show that the aim of learning English has never been satisfactorily achieved (Gunarwan, 2000). According to Nurkamto (2000), there are some factors challenging the teaching of English in Indonesia, they are: (1) English is a foreign language in Indonesia, in which the students are exposed to English only in the classroom, (2) Indonesia is miles away from English speaking countries, which gives the learners very little chance to use the target language in the real-life situations, (3) Indonesia owns several traditional views which do not give any motivation to the learners to learn things maximally, (4) academic and professional qualification of the teachers are not adequate, (5) the number of students in one classroom is large, (6) the learning aids are not complete, and (7) the evaluation system is not compatible with the communicative language learning.

Helping teachers facing these challenges, English teaching experts have created various methods in English Language Teaching. There is one method that interests the researcher most, namely Community Language Learning (CLL) method. Community Language Learning is based on the theory that a supportive community is capable to lessen the learner's anxiety (Brown, 2007).

Community Language Learning method is listed under an approach named Communicative Language Learning. There have been a number of experts who provide us the definition of Communicative Language Teaching. Wesche and Skehan (2002) described that CLT: (1) has activities that require frequent interaction among learners or with other interlocutors to exchange information and solve problems, (2) uses of authentic (non-pedagogic) texts and communication activities

linked to real-world contexts, and (3) is an approach that is learner centered, which takes the learners' backgrounds, language needs, and goals into account.

Although this Communicative Language Teaching approach seemed to meet the needs of the students' communicative ability development, it was too ambitious and the requirements for its success were difficult. Creating a meaningful condition for English language learning in Indonesia was not always easy. Musthafa (2001) listed the problems as: (1) the absence of good, authentic learning materials; (2) the teachers' tendency to rely on non-communicatively engaging learning tasks; and (3) the absence of visible social uses of the language outside the classroom.

Moreover, the partial understanding on CLT had misled the English teachers in Indonesia to see this approach as only to build the learners' oral skills (listening and speaking skill). They often put the emphasis on the speaking skill without considering the bigger importance of the other three skills; they are, listening, reading, and writing.

The teaching of the four skills in Indonesia was faced with "the fact that English is taught as a foreign language, which then means reading becomes the primary goal of learning English." (Dubin and Bycina, 1991). Reading might evoke one's background knowledge and previous experience that are related to the reading materials she is reading (McDonough and Shaw, 1993). According to Hadi (2006), it was an obvious phenomenon in Indonesia that many English language classes cannot run successfully without the use of reading materials.

Therefore, beside the Community Language Learning, classroom reading activities would also be the focus in this study. The researcher would also provide useful information about the approach, method and technique which were in line.

Helping the readers distinguished each of them; Brown (2007) provided us the definitions of approaches, methods, and techniques. An approach is defined as a set of theories about the nature of language learning. A method resembles the approach which covers specification and interrelation of theory and practice. While a technique covers activities conducted in classrooms which are consistent with the method and the approach as well.

From here, it can be seen that an approach is the most general one. Therefore, in this study, the researcher included a theory of an approach named Communicative Language Teaching. There are two methods which are in line with CLT approach; they are (1) Direct Method, and (2) Community Language Learning Method.

There are two methods which are in line with CLT approach; they are (1) Direct Method, and (2) Community Language Learning Method. As proposed by the researcher, CLL would be the focus on this study.

Community Language Learning had several techniques. After conducting a pre-observation, the researcher put the focus on the Small Group Discussion technique which is implemented by the subject of this study.

This technique was included in the Community Language Learning method. In this technique, the students were divided into several small groups. Therefore, the students were supposed to work together in their groups.

Working in a group allowed the learners to exchange their opinion which would make it easier for them to complete the given task. As for the teacher, it would help the teacher to cope with a large class and/or a limited time. This was one advantage of Small Group Discussion technique that could help EFL learners in their reading activities. Previous studies showed that this advantage of Small Group Discussion technique also appeared in EFL speaking activities and EFL writing activities as well as in EFL reading activities.

Based on the background of the study above, the research investigation was developed into research questions, they were:
1. How does the teacher implement CLL through Small Group Discussion in teaching reading analytical exposition text in SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Surabaya?
2. What problems occur during the implementation of CLL through Small Group Discussion in teaching reading analytical exposition text?
3. How is the students' response toward the implementation of CLL through Small Group Discussion in teaching reading analytical exposition text?

There had been many studies related to Small Group Discussion and reading conducted by experts in EFL teaching and ELT in many countries throughout the world. Those studies had the idea that Small Group Discussion could be very helpful for the learners' communicative competence.

This technique was included in Community Language Learning method which reflected the principles of CLT approach.

Jakfar (2006) stated several advantages of using Small Group Discussion; they were, (1) it enables the students to decide the pace they want to take based on their interest, ability, motivation, and needs, (2) the students do not have to be discouraged to express themselves, and (3) the students will have greater chance

to use the language activity. Ur (1981) described that in a small group discussion, the students would be able to learn from each other. They might also correct each other's mistakes, help out with a needed word and teach each other some non-linguistic material through the content of the discussion.

However, there were also several problem that normally occurred during the implementation of Small Group Discussion technique; they are, (1) students are unprepared, (2) naturally quiet students do not participate, (3) some students dominate the conversation, (4) students may share inaccurate information, and (5) it is hard for the teacher to grade.

To ensure that the small group discussion worked well, an effective teacher was essential. The following criteria were mentioned by McCrorie (2006) for teachers to be an effective tutor. In fact, any teaching event would be more successful if the teachers (1) are enthusiastic, (2) have organized the session well, (3) have a feeling for the subject, (4) can conceptualize the topic, (5) have empathy with the learners, (6) understand how people learn, (7) have skills in teaching and managing learning, (8) are alert to context, (9) are teaching with preferred teaching style, and (10) have a wide range of skills in their teaching repertoire, including questioning, listening, reinforcing, reacting, summarizing, and leadership.

Leading a small group discussion needed a preparation. Lubis (1985) stated some ways to prepare a small group discussion in a classroom; they were,
1. Divide the class into small groups of three to six people each group.
2. Give each group a different topic.
3. Have one student in each group to write down the important points as the group having the discussion.
4. Allow the groups to discuss their topics for at least ten minutes.
5. Have one student in each group to be a spokesman who will report the result of the group discussion in front of the class.
6. Allow the students to deliver questions to the one speaking in the front.

In this study, the Small Group Discussion technique is implemented in teaching reading. One obvious phenomena in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia was that almost no English language class could run successfully without the use of reading materials. As stated by Hadi (2006), "reading is always a prerequisite to achieve the goal of any English language teaching and learning." It seemed that beginning an English language class with activities focusing on reading skill and then relating it to activities of the other 3 language skills was done to realize the integration of language skills in teaching EFL in Indonesia.

According to Cahyono and Widiati (2006), in teaching reading, EFL teachers should avoid simply asking the learners to answer the questions following a reading text for some reasons: (1) merely assigning the students a text and requiring them to answer a series of comprehension questions when they are finished is like a testing rather than a teaching strategy (Dubin and Bycina, 1991), (2) such an approach does nothing to provide learners with the skills and strategies needed to become strategic readers in particular, as well as strategic learners in general.

In this study, the Small Group Discussion technique was implemented in teaching reading Analytical Exposition text.

Analytical Exposition text is defined as a kind of text which expresses the writer's idea about a phenomenon. The idea in the composition of analytical exposition is clearly expressed, whether it stands for or against the phenomenon. Therefore, this type of text had the communicative purpose of persuading the readers with the argument expressed in the composition.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a descriptive qualitative research. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999: 60), the purpose of a qualitative research was "to stress the unique strength of the genre for the research that is exploratory or descriptive, that assumes the value of context and setting, and that searches for a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon." Thus, this study took into account the context and setting which might influence the implementation of the technique.

The subjects of the study were the teacher and the students of XI-IPA-3 class in SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Surabaya. The students were the second graders of senior high school. They were supposed to learn Analytical Exposition text for their reading materials in the end of the semester.

The researcher was the key instrument of this study. The researcher would use four instruments in collecting the data; they are (1) observation checklist, (2) field-note, (3) interview, and (4) questionnaire.

To analyze the data of this study, the researcher read all the data gathered from the observation checklist, field-notes, interviews, and questionnaires. As reading the data, the researcher organized the information with "immersion strategies which do not prefigure categories and which rely heavily on the researcher's intuitive and

interpretive capacities," (Marshall and Rossman, 1999: 151).

The data gathered from the teacher through interviews and observations were analyzed descriptively. The result of the interviews, the observation checklist and field notes were then compiled to give information to the researcher about the teacher's idea in implementing Small Group Discussion in teaching reading Analytical Exposition text. Also, the data would give information to the researcher about the problems that occur during the implementation of Small Group Discussion technique in teaching reading Analytical Exposition text.

Other than from the teacher, the researcher also gathered information from the students who experienced the implementation of CLL through Small Group Discussion in their reading activities. The data gathered from questionnaires given to the students would give information about their response toward the implementation of Small Group Discussion technique in their classroom reading activities. With that, the researcher would have the idea whether their response were as expected by the teacher or not.

After analyzing all the data, the researcher would have an organized information about how the theories of CLL approach and Small Group Discussion technique happened in a real EFL classroom (how the teacher implemented it, how the students responded to it, what problems that might occur, etc.). These would be discussed further in the next chapter.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After collecting and analyzing all the data, the researcher elaborated the research findings in order to answer the research questions. The discussion is done in three parts based on the research questions.

The Implementation of Small Group Discussion

In the first meeting, the teacher managed to form small groups among the students. The teacher arranged the groupings before explaining to the students the purpose of forming groups. There were 5 groups consisting of 4-5 students. The teacher did not pick the members of each group. The teacher gave the students chance to decide their own group members. The students directly arranged their seats so that they could work better with the group members although the teacher did not ask them to.

After the groups were formed, the teacher explained the purpose of forming groups. The teacher explained that they were going to work in groups. They were to discuss about Analytical Exposition text. There were several Analytical Exposition texts in the students' textbooks. The teacher divided the text so that each group

got one text to be discussed. They were asked to discuss about the content, the generic structure and the language features of the text.

As elaborated before, Small Group Discussion lies under Community Language Learning method. There were theories about the description, the advantages, the disadvantages, and the steps in preparing a small group discussion. However, the result showed that there were several points that did not reflect the theories provided by the researcher.

One advantage of small group discussion was that the students got the opportunity to exchange information with the other members in a group. However, there was one problem attaching to the advantage; that was that the students might share inaccurate information. This problem actually had a solution suggested by Ur (1981). The thought that the students might share inaccurate information could be solved by putting one or two students in each group who had a higher understanding in the subject than the rest of the students.

In spite of using the above suggestion, the teacher allowed the students to form their own small groups, to decide the members of their small groups. Nevertheless, this did not mean that the teacher abandoned the theories. In fact, the teacher followed the theory of Community Language Learning method.

The basic idea of the Community Language Learning method was providing a supportive community which was able to lessen the learners' anxiety caused by the educational context (Brown, 2007). This method suggests that the teacher should be sensitive to the learners' level of confidence and give them what they need to be successful. The learners can learn best when they have a choice in what they practice (Brown, 2007).

Problem Occurrence Investigation

After the classroom observation, the researcher had an interview with the teacher. It was about the teacher's evaluation on the implementation of Small Group Discussion technique in her classroom.

The first problem she encountered was motivating the students to use English during the group discussion. The teacher said that the students always felt that using English was confusing. The students said that after they finished one sentence, they tended to forget their idea. It resulted in the students keeping silent when they were asked to use English.

Another problem that the teacher shared was the classroom management. The teacher felt that the classroom got more crowded when they were working in groups. Nevertheless, the teacher was completely aware that she could not possibly just stand in front. She had to move around checking the works of each group. She

admitted that sometimes she felt exhausted because she needed to answer similar questions several times.

The last problem that the teacher mentioned was the assessment. When checking the works of each group, she noted that there were students who dominated the discussion, and also there were students who did not even share her opinion. The teacher admitted that she got problem in giving scores.

As elaborated before, there was several description of an effective teacher to ensure that the small group discussion went well. The teacher should be enthusiastic, organizing the session well, able to conceptualize the topic, understanding the students' learning style, having preferred teaching style, and managing learning activities well. As in Community Language Learning method, the teacher should take the responsibility for clearly structuring activities in the most appropriate way for the successful completion of the activities.

Speaking of assessment, having one in a small group discussion was not an easy thing to do. In a group, each student took different part in the discussion. Some students participated more than the others, almost dominating, while the others might only stay passive. With this condition, assessing was surely problematic. From the elaborated theories, there were two solutions which were likely suitable for solving the subject's problem. First, the teacher needed to be clear and announced to the students whether she would assess the outcome or the process. The second solution was that the teacher should never keep group membership the same over for the next group discussion.

The Students' Response on the Implementation of Small Group Discussion

The last result to be discussed was of the questionnaires. The discussion on the result of the questionnaires would give an answer to the last research question.

The questionnaires were divided into three focuses. The first focus was on the interaction between the teacher and the students. The next focus was on the classroom reading activities for Analytical Exposition text. And the last focus was on the Small Group Discussion technique.

The result of the first two questions showed that the students were all interested in learning English. The teacher kept on encouraging the students to use English when communicating in classroom activities by getting them gradually accustomed to normal greetings and simple instructions rather than by forcing them to speak in English.

The result of the next three questions showed that the students were not so interested in reading activities or in Analytical Exposition text. As explained in chapter two, reading activities were often regarded as passive. Students normally got easily bored in such monotonous comprehension reading activities. Moreover, it was Analytical Exposition text that they were learning. The text might seem a bit difficult for the students since it contained a lot of unfamiliar scientific expressions.

The result of the last four questions showed that there were students who did not enjoy the small group discussion, but there were more students who enjoyed the discussion activity. The teacher's decision on allowing the students arranging their own group membership brought about a positive impact. It should have been a common sense that students could not feel more supported than to learn something together with their close friends.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

After completing the data analysis, the researcher presented the conclusion and suggestion regarding to the implementation of Small Group Discussion technique.

Conclusion

Based on the data analysis on the previous chapter, the researcher concludes that small group discussion technique is well-implemented by the teacher. Although several steps in the theory were not followed, the teacher was still able to manage to bring about the advantages of small group discussion technique.

From the students' responses, it can be seen that they are enthusiastic in the classroom activity. According to the teacher, the biggest advantage of this teaching technique is that it can reduce the students' anxiety. The teacher assumed that, for most of her students, the material (Analytical Exposition text) is not easy. Working in small groups allows the students to exchange information with the other members in a group. This way, the students will understand the material better.

On the other hand, the teacher also finds some troubles in implementing this teaching technique. The teacher finds it harder than usual to manage the classroom, to make sure every student took part in the discussion. And the same condition goes for the assessment. In a small group, there are students who are dominant and there are also students who do not even contribute ideas.

All in all, every teaching technique has its own advantage and disadvantage. However, a teaching technique will work best when the teacher understands it well and implements it accordingly with the classroom condition.

Suggestion

Regarding to the result of the study, the researcher finds it necessary to includes several suggestion dealing with the Implementation Small Group Discussion.

Many ELT experts have provided teachers with theories of teaching techniques. The researcher is aware that implementing those theories in real life classroom activities is not an easy thing to do since theories can possibly be totally different with what happened to real life classrooms. Therefore, teachers should be creative to match the students' needs, the materials, and the teaching technique. The teaching technique is not necessarily implemented fully. As long as the teaching technique matches with the materials and meets the students' needs, then the implementation can be considered successful.

For further researches, the researcher will recommend further investigation on encouraging students for reading activities. Reading is often considered boring by the students. On the other hand, reading is important for gaining knowledge and information. The researcher believes that it will be beneficial for English learning progress if the students can be encouraged to reading activities.

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