

**Teaching Reading and Writing
to English Department Students of Low Proficiency**
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Reading and Writing can be a real problem to university students whose English proficiency is low, especially when reading and writing are included in one subject. A little humanistic touch, manifested in the teaching of reading and writing, can motivate these students to perform better. This paper discusses ways to boost students' motivation and comprehension in reading and writing and also discusses the use of translation in teaching reading. Real examples of students' paragraphs, the correction, and comments are also given.

Introduction

Since English is still a foreign language in Indonesia, it is not an easy subject to learn, especially reading and writing. For students studying at English Departments, reading and writing can be real problems, especially if their English proficiency is low. Some students do not read a lot in Bahasa Indonesia, let alone in English, moreover if the text is difficult. Writing is even more difficult for them, especially if it is academic English. They can be reluctant to read and moreover to write, in spite of the assignments they have to submit in order to pass and continue their study at the English Department. Some low proficient students cannot pass the course after retaking it for the first time and even have to take it again until the third time. Apparently, they do not only have linguistic problems.

The Written English Class

In the curriculum of the English Department of Petra Christian University, reading and writing are included in one four-credit course; it is called Written English (I-IV). The classes used in this research were two classes of Written English I. Students have to submit three paragraphs of different types in one semester. Students joining the observed classes did not only have difficulties in writing, but they did not read a lot, even in Bahasa Indonesia. Therefore, in teaching such students, the teacher had to cope with the students' academic problems in reading and writing, and also with the students' motivation. To handle these two problems, academic and motivation, extra work should be done by the teacher. Inspired by what Lightbown and Spada (2006, p. 37) say based on Krashen's model, "a learner who is tense, anxious, or bored may 'filter out' input, making it unavailable for acquisition", another strategy should be used.

Methodology

The method used in teaching reading and writing in these two classes was based on humanistic strategies in Mardijono's article (2001), which aims to "enhance learning to bring out the best of the students, to help the students lower their anxiety and enhance their emotional well-being"; she further says "the primary aims of the humanistic strategies were to help the students, through active participation, to develop more positive feelings about themselves and their classmates, in a positive group atmosphere" (Mardijono, 2001, 95). She also says "... if the group members, the teacher and students can co-operate to create a conducive group atmosphere, ... the affective side of each individual is well attended to, students can be expected to have better academic achievement" (Mardijono, 2001, 94). The strategies used to deal with the affective side of the students to facilitate learning are 'the strategies that Moskowitz (1978) called "the humanistic strategies"' (Mardijono, 2001, 94).

In teaching low-proficiency students, paying attention to the affective side of the students is inevitable. Reflecting on the difficulties of the subjects that the students encounter, I do think that a good way to encourage the students to keep on trying to do their best is by applying the humanistic strategies. Although in her article Mardijono (2001) also talks about giving and receiving supports from peers, I did not really emphasize on peer support. I do agree that peer support is very important; in fact, in one of my articles, I have said that “the bonding among peers is very important (Rini, 2014). In that article I talk about speaking class and so does Mardijono (2001), while the classes I am talking about here is reading and writing classes. Because of the different nature of the classes, the points in the humanistic strategies from Mardijono’s article (2001) that were used are as follows: empathizing with the students, minimizing criticism, encouraging self-evaluation, and involving students’ active participation.

The subjects of the research were only eight students in each class. The students observed were two classes of successive semesters. In terms of materials, both classes were given the same materials in reading and writing. Students were asked to read children books in the first half of the semester and write summaries of the stories. They were asked to read articles from magazines. The first class was asked to choose articles from any magazine of any topic they like. The second class was asked to choose any articles from Readers’ Digest. They were also asked to write summaries. All were corrected in terms of grammatical mistakes. The readings in the textbook given for Written English I were also discussed in class. The discussion involved translation; students were asked to translate orally the reading texts. The goal was to make the students understand the text sentence by sentence. The reading texts already provided cloze-test-like summaries.

For writing, students were asked to submit three assignments per semester. For each of the three assignments, they were asked to do free writing first before submitting the outline. Then, they were taught to cluster the ideas to develop the outline. Free writing and clustering were done in class, not as home assignments, so that they could ask the teacher if they have problems. Usually for one assignment, students’ outlines, first draft, and final draft were corrected, but in this class it was not only those three, but also second, third, fourth drafts. Correction was done as fast as the students finished writing.

At the end of the semester, the students of the first class were asked whether reading children book, making summaries, choosing the children book and the topics they like in reading and writing were helpful, and the use of translation in reading were helpful for them or not. The students in the next class were given questionnaires in Bahasa Indonesia to answer on the same questions as the previous.

Boosting motivation for reading

The students in my class did not like reading and they did not read even in Bahasa Indonesia. Imagine if they were given difficult reading texts in English. They would not want to read the assignment. Therefore, even though they are university students, the solution taken was giving the students easy readings in English, namely children book. The hope was that something easy would not make them reluctant to read. The encouragement to read was expected to be doubled when they were also free to choose the stories. When the language was easy and the content was also easy, they were expected to be willing to read the text. When the language was difficult, although they like the content, they would not be that diligent. This expectation occurred in the students’ response.

Their response could be seen from the summaries they submitted. When they were asked to submit the summaries of the children stories, they submitted them every week. It was different from the assignment to read more difficult readings. In submitting summaries of more difficult readings, students of both classes were always late. The summaries also

showed that they did not completely understand what they read. They only took a sentence or two from several paragraphs.

Their response can also be seen both in the answers to my question, whether or not reading children book was helpful for them. Below was what one student said

Sangat membantu, karena buku anak-anak menggunakan kalimat atau kata-kata yang mudah dimengerti dan grammar yang cukup banyak membantu dalam proses belajar. Lebih membuat saya tertarik dan penasaran dalam membaca suatu buku cerita terutama yang ceritanya sangat bagus. Saya jadi lebih terpancing dan mau membuka buku untuk membaca.... (very helpful, because children books use easy and understandable words or sentences which help the process of learning. I was more attracted to read good books. I was willing to open books and read them.)

Most of them agreed that it was helpful. One student who said that it was not helpful was the student whose English was not bad, but he did not pass Written English 1 because of being absent too often.

Translation as a technique in conveying meaning

Actually translation is not a new technique in language teaching. It had been used for centuries as a technique in foreign language teaching. With the rise of many methods, translation is marginal (Cook, 2007). Despite that fact, translation was used while discussing the reading materials assigned for them in the semester with a purpose to make the students understand the reading materials.

Below is what one student said concerning the use of translation in reading.

Dengan terjemahan membantu saya lebih mudah mengerti maksud dari kata atau kalimat tersebut. Dan juga saya mendapatkan beberapa kosa kata yang tidak saya ketahui sebelumnya. Tanpa terjemahan susah buat saya untuk menganalisa kata-kata yang belum pernah saya ketahui sebelumnya. Oleh karena itu, terjemahan sangat berguna dalam reading. (With translation I can understand more the meaning of a word or a sentence. I also get some words that I did not know. Without translation it is hard for me to analyze words I did not know. Therefore, translation is very useful in reading.)

Another student said approximately the same thing and added as follows

...dan kita juga bukan mengartikan per kata namun mengartikan per kalimat karena setiap kalimat mempunyai relasi atau hubungan dengan kalimat yang lain. Dan dengan begitu kita belajar bukan untuk mengerti atau tahu isi bacaan, namun kita mengerti apa yang ingin disampaikan penulis kepada kita lewat bacaan yang mereka tulis. (... we did not translate per word, but per sentence because each sentence is related to the others. That way we learn not only the content of the text, but comprehend what the writer wants to say.)

Most of them said that translation was helpful because when they listened to the Indonesian version, they understood it. The fact that they did not understand the text was proved when they were asked to translate. They came up with translation outside context. For example, what they understand by "address" is *alamat*, although the context means "speech". Translation is used in the teaching of reading to convey the meaning in order to empathize

with the students, trying to understand how the students felt if they did not understand the readings. I did not criticize the students if they gave wrong answers or translations of the texts. I encouraged the students to evaluate their own ability so that they were willing to work more on the next readings.

Repeated and fast correction as a motivation boost for writing

All the readings should be summarized and the summaries were used to help them improve their grammar and also their ability in writing. For the writing assignments, the content of writing and grammar can be corrected and correction is carried out as soon as the students finished writing to give the impression that the lecturer is paying attention to them. In the first half of the semester correction done for the second class was done in the soft copy as the example below. In the second half it was done manually.

Sleeping with a new creation

Sleeping in the hotel is good with a beautiful design and complete facilities. Beautiful design is like the wall use a wallpaper and the colour is interesting. Complete facilities is are like in the hotel there are a swimming pool, fitness room for someone who wants to do some activities there. The environment is broad and no pollution. Sleeping in a big room is more comfortable than in a small room. Cleanliness is important, because if the room is dirty we cannot feel comfortable eventhough the room is big.

Comment [S1]: Check the dictionary the meaning of sleeping with

Comment [S2]: What do you want to say about this?

Comment [S3]: This is about the room

Comment [S4]: This is outside the room

Comment [S5]: This about the room

Correction for the above example was done several times until the draft looked better as the example below.

Staying in a hotel is more comfortable

A beautiful design and complete facilities make me enjoy staying in a hotel. They design the wall beautifully. They use a wallpaper with an interesting picture and colour. Sometimes there are some people who do not like a wallpaper with an interesting picture. They prefer an ordinary wallpaper. It depend on whether people like an ordinary wallpaper or not. The position of the bed, the table, the sofa, the bathroom and the floor are very good. The bed is soft and facing north. The table is big and has a glass on it. The sofa is comfortable to sleep on. The bathroom does not has a bad smell. On the floor, it has a carpet. The layout is very nice. In the hotel, there are a complete facilities that we can use. It has a swimming pool, a fitness room, a restaurant, a souvenir shop, a sauna room, a lounge, a cafe and bar, a garden and a beach. The swimming pool is indoor. The fitness room is big and many people can come to do some physical exercises. The restaurant is great, the food is delicious and the service is good. The garden is immense, we can relax and enjoy the atmosphere. The last, it has a beautiful beach with a white sand and clean. Many people come there to see a waves. Sometimes they take a picture while waiting sunset in the afternoon.

By correcting and giving the work back to the students as soon as possible, students are encouraged to participate actively. One draft was corrected more than four times—although there was only one draft according to the basic course outline (BCO). In my class, students could revise more than four times; thus, they did more and participated more actively.

Conclusion

Empathizing with the students, minimizing criticism, encouraging self-evaluation, and involving students' active participation are manifested in the use of translation and children book in teaching reading, repeated and fast correction in teaching writing. All of these strategies are meant to make the students feel comfortable in the class and enjoy the class.

References:

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