

Effective English Language Teaching Strategy For Vocational Education

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Abstract

English language teaching in vocational education is more challenging than in academic education. Variations of learners' English backgrounds (low intake) and high demands of ESP for learners of vocational colleges aggravate the situations. Conventional teaching strategies such as lecturing and tutoring might not be sufficient to cope with these problems. Educators should utilize more effective way to improve teaching and learning in order to maximize students' achievements. Various strategies have been used by previous researchers to solve these obstacles. Yet, Cooperative learning strategy is a promising solution to promote better English learning in vocational educations. Thus, this article tries to describe the use of a Cooperative Learning strategy in teaching English for vocational education students. The application of the strategy proved that the students could achieve better achievements in English through the strategy than conventional ones. The results revealed that the strategy is effective to use in vocational educations.

Keywords: *Teaching Strategy, Cooperative Learning, English, Vocational Education*

1. Introduction

Language teaching and learning techniques, methodologies and strategies have been developed from time to time. Starting from the early ages, English language teaching and learning focus on learning from drills and imitation like in direct approach and audio lingual method. Generally, the purpose of these types of teaching is to explain grammar or rules of the language. These methods could not improve students' learning process and achievement. Applying these teaching techniques in vocational or technical college makes the situation even more horrible. It could not provide the needs of workplace communication for students as needed in English for Specific Purposes. Suitable method and strategies are needed to solve problems in learning process and achievement.

Nowadays, paradigm of English language teaching has changed to teaching language of actual context in real communication. The development of English courses brings up new methods and strategies for specific groups of students. It derives from idea that classrooms and needs of situation are varied one to another. The specific situations determined the application of methods and strategies in language subject. These must promote students centered learning and communicative aspects of English language teaching.

English teaching in vocational college or college of technology is always a challenge for educators as well as learners. Most, if not all the students have problems with learning English. The students have less desire in learning the language and were not motivated to learn English. While, conventional teaching cannot provide maximum exposure of real work simulation to learners. In Addition, Most students can not see the relation between English courses and real work communication. Consequently, only few of the students considered the current courses practice benefit their future career.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

Demand of English for specific purposes in vocational institution is relatively high. The students are expected to be able to communicate effectively to prepare them to work. All four English language skills cannot be improved by applying conventional teaching instruction to the students. The courses content or materials should focus more on the knowledge of language in specialized field than on improving their general English language skills. It is also suggested that the lecturer to concern about the students' needs in planning the course curriculum. Therefore, lecturer must utilize suitable strategy in their teaching.

The need of English for specific purposes (ESP) is undeniable today since learning should highlight learners' future needs for career development. ESP focuses on learners' successfulness in future jobs or academic (Robinson, 1991). Similarly, Sincer (2017) stated that ESP can bridge the teaching with situations that learners' face in their work. Originally, ESP or also known as English for Vocational Purposes (EVP) is considered part of English for Specific Purposes. It can also be competency training for students in shaping their vocational knowledge and applying their skills to communicate, performe, and develop language of their field (Widodo, 2016). In other word it is aimed to improve knowledge and skills of the field as well as their language.

Concerning the importance of ESP for language learners, the roles of educators are significant. However Kusni, 2013 stated that there are several problems regarding to ESP teachers in Indonesia; irrelevant background of education, less

ESP teaching experience, limited professionals training and reluctance in developing their competence. He added, Indonesia is quite unique as no specific institution for ESP teachers' education and training. While in China, there has been reformation in the core of English teaching in recent years. ESP is currently the main focus of English language teaching for higher education. Luo (2017) states "The aim of training teachers of ESP is not to make them subject experts, but to maximize their linguistic knowledge and skills. Teachers must acquire an essential general grasp of the subject with the co-operation and/or collaboration of subject teachers".

Suggestions regarding to ESP teaching through online learning were proposed by Mei-yan and Chang (2010). There were at least two essential things to improve students' learning and avoid future problems in ESP teaching. Firstly, there should be Students' Training. The students should first understand well about the learning method. They have to be able to learn through students centered-learning rather than conventional teacher centered one. Then, there should also be Teachers' Training. Teachers must also consider their roles in online language teaching. Their main job is to facilitate the students' learning; they prepare materials needed, organize the learning and guide learners through the learning process. In addition, collaboration and cooperation among teachers, between teachers and students are also important. It means that ensuring interactions among learners and teachers can help better result.

Furthermore, Mei-yan and Chang (2010) stated that cooperative learning through online has several advantages. It teaches social skills, improves teamwork and makes them independent, as well as gives them new experiences. In other words, working cooperatively can benefit students a lot. The students can learn several important skills such as responding to ideas, discussing; offering advice, giving suggestions or assistance, sharing ideas and creative thinking, synthesizing ideas.

Cooperative Learning Strategy

One of prospective teaching strategies is cooperative learning. The main goal of a good strategy in teaching language is to ensure the experience of real communication. Cooperative learning provides better chances for the students to be able to communicate in the target language, especially in learning English. Thus, strategies used in the classroom must be able to reach the goal maximally. This strategy provides big chance for students centered learning. The purpose of this is to expose the theoretical knowledge of language through cooperation among students. By using cooperative competence among the students, the linguistics competences or the theoretical knowledge can be gained automatically and optimally. Applying cooperative learning also brings positive effects to students psychologically. Cooperation reduces burdens of acquiring the language better than in individual learning.

Experts are in similar opinions about benefits of Cooperative Learning. Slavin (1990) suggested several benefits of the strategy for learners as well as. Firstly, it could create better learning conditions. Then, it could lead to positive learning process. Consequently, that can improve students' learning achievement, especially for low level students. The strategy forces students work in team that could also increase students self-esteem and confidence and improve relations among them. While for teachers, Hamm & Adams (1992) identified benefits of using cooperative learning for teachers. As a result of applying the strategy, teachers can become more cooperative in their own professional interactions and more willing to collaborate with their peers. Next, by using this strategy peer teaching and correction is more promoted. Teacher can manage time spent more effectively. Then, teachers can adopt a fresh, new attitude toward their job; and teachers have a greater time to validate their own, values and ideas. It means that the strategy is effective for both students and teachers.

There are various cooperative learning strategies have been developed and extensively researched for years. Some of these cooperative learning strategies are namely Jigsaw, Team Accelerated Instruction (TAI), Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC), Number Heads Together, Student Team Achievement Division (STAD), and Partnership. Each of these cooperative learning strategies have their own strengths and weaknesses. However, this type of strategy has been claimed and proved to be superior in improving teaching and learning process that can increase the students' achievement. It provides both atmosphere of competition among groups of students as well as promoting individual performance by peer teaching and corrections. Kagan (2009: 17.20-17.21) states that STAD is a proven effective strategy to mastery of basic knowledge. Researches of STAD have also revealed positive impacts of this strategy in building good relations among learners and develop various types of social relations.

Kagan (2009) also states that the use of STAD includes enduring teams, improvement point scoring system, which provides high motivation for students across range of ability levels. STAD consists of five main components. Class presentations, teams, quizzes, individual improvement scoring, and team recognition. Furthermore, Chen (2008) states the main features of STAD that can be practiced in the classrooms namely; Class Presentations (Teacher), Teams /Group (Practice Group Discussion), Quizzes, Individual Improvement Scoring (Individual quiz about content-related questions by teachers), Team Recognition (Evaluating groups' scores and rewarding the winning group by teachers).

2. Materials and Methods

This research was done in descriptive method. In the research, the writers tried to describe a phenomenon of English language teaching in vocational college especially in State Polytechnic of Bengkalis. The researcher used this method to explain the strength of a Cooperative Learning strategies; STAD in improving teaching and learning processes and solving problems in classroom. The strategy it self had been applied to improve teaching of English for Specific Purpose. The study focused on describing the implementation of cooperative learning and impacts to the teachers' teaching and as well as students' performance. It aims to describe improvements of teaching process and how STAD could solve the teacher's and students' problem in learning.

3. Result and Discussion

Teaching ESP Using Cooperative Learning

State Polytechnic of Bengkalis consists of several study Programs that can be divided into social and technical departments. Every department has it own curriculum design and its need of English for specific purposes for students. The students can also be divided into English majored and non-English majored students from various departments. Those students take different courses in various levels depending on the policy of each department. Most of the departments have ESP courses at higher semester for sophomore. The students' English backgrounds are also varied individually and among study programs and departments.

Coping with these situations, English lecturers have applied one of cooperative learning strategy; Student Team Achievement Division (STAD). In applying this, lecturers followed several steps suggested by Chen (2008) and Kagan (2009). Firstly, lecturers did class presentations. These presentation were not like usual, lecturer does not only present the content materials. The goal of this was to ensure that the students comprehend activities that followed the presentation in each meeting. The second steps was dividing teams. The lecturer divided the students into some small groups which consisted of the same numbers of students from various academic backgrounds. In dividing the group members, the lecturer considered the students' English ability. Then, one of the students was chosen as the leader of the group. The leader of each group was one with good ability. The next step was giving Quizzes. The lecturer gave quizzes related to the lesson in each meeting. Each group was given the same tasks and they could only discuss them with their teammate. The quizzes were given everyweek. Then, the lecturers checked individual improvement scoring. The scores measured in each quizz was the accumulation of the team's members scores. In other words, individual scores of each member were taken into account to team scores. Consequently, each team did the best effort not only for individual but also for team achievement.

There have been numbers of study about the use of these strategies in teaching English. The results showed positive effects either on students and teachers in English language teaching and learning process. These proves are significant enough for the writer to focus on describing positive impacts of implementing cooperative learning strategies in English for Specific Purposes in vocational college including in state polytechnic of Bengkalis.

Benefits of Using Cooperative Learning in Teaching ESP

Applications of the cooperative learning contribute significant improvement on process of learning that also influence the students' achievements. Unlike other conventional strategy, it could reduce the students' burden in learning that could be seen from the students activeness in learning process. Applying this strategy also increased the students' courage in expressing their idea in the classroom. Fujiwara (2015) conducted a research on teaching writing ESP through Cooperative Learning (CL). The results of questionnaires indicated that students had a positive attitude toward the strategy. Moreover it is revealed that CL is effective to increase students' self confidence writing. In addition, it also helped the lecturer to manage the class. This strategy increased the students' activeness and communicative competence.

On the other hand, Nadrag (2017) has conducted a study to analyze the students' attitudes towards the Cooperative Learning in ESP classes. The study also tried to examine the cooperative behaviors among students. The research results indicate that the students enjoy studying ESP through the application of Cooperative Learning. The strategy could better improve students' oral production and reading comprehension. In sum, applying the strategy is effective to improve students' reading, communication and interaction skills. Similarly, a research on the analyses of the teamwork roles, how cooperative learning promotes cooperation, competition, develops teamwork and reading skills in the ESP classroom was conducted by Alina and Lavinia (2017). The experimental study revealed the experimental group students had better self-confidence and learnt the lesson easier. Moreover, it improves their grammar through peer feedbacks from classmates. Teacher could also create enjoyable classroom atmosphere. The findings indicated that learners learnt reading through Cooperative Learning activities had better achievement levels than those learnt through conventional strategy. In sum, the strategy is proven effective in improving students' English reading comprehension skill.

Previous researches results are in line with a study conducted by Rionaldi, et.al (2016). The study was about using one of cooperative learning strategy; STAD to Improve English students TOEIC scores. The participants of the study were 30 students of English major academic year 2016/2017. This classroom action research was conducted in two cycles. The researcher apply steps of STAD in improving students TOEIC learning. The result of the study proved that STAD was effective in improving the teaching and learning process and change the students' way in learning. The study also suggested the lecturer as well as the students to conduct English teaching and learning by using STAD. These researches explain effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies on students' achievements and perceptions. Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the strategies can be an effective strategy to teach English. It can promote learning with better atmosphere to students. It provide opportunity of peer teaching, sharing among students. Moreover, sense of competition can encourage the students to compete and explore their ability in learning English language. Overall, It is proven that the strategy is effective in creating better teaching and learning of English in classroom.

4. Conclusion

The study explains the applications and the strengths of cooperative learning strategies in teaching English for Specific Purposes. Cooperative learning strategies can contribute to teaching and learning processes that improve the students' achievement. The results is in line with a study conducted about cooperative learning strategies; STAD in improving students' TOEIC learning. The results of the study revealed that the strategy could better improve the process of learning. It could increase students' cognitive ability as well as self-confidence. It also provided chances of peer-teaching and peer corrections and knowledge sharing among the learners. Moreover, sense of competition can encourage the students to compete and explore their ability in learning English language. In short, this strategy contributes many advantages to both students and the lecturers. Overall, it is proven that cooperative learning particularly; STAD strategy is effective in teaching English for vocational education.

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