

Using Critical Pedagogy to Criticize Methods of TEFL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of writing this teaching experience-based paper is to share the writer's experience in using Critical Pedagogy to criticize methods of TEFL in his TEFL Class. Students of TEFL class, at the end of the program, should be able to choose methods which are appropriate for their English teachings. In the era of world English, English language and its culture should be taught within the framework of the culture of the society where English is taught. It means that the teaching of English is not merely the teaching of a foreign language, but also the process of developing the nation character.

Critical Pedagogy views, that there are discrimination and marginalization (in terms of race, social class or gender) in all social systems. Educational systems, on the other hand, are reflections of social systems within which they operate. The use of critical pedagogy to criticize methods of TEFL can open students' minds and help them to make a choice of methods dealing with the system of education. It implies an understanding that the choice of methods is not only a matter of selecting the appropriate one for the class, but also a work of understanding the social system.

Key words: Critical Pedagogy, TEFL, Methods

INTRODUCTION

One of the compulsory subjects which has to be studied by students of English Education Department (EED), the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, the University of Muria Kudus, is TEFL (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language). This 2 credits subject shares the knowledge of English Language Teaching (the approaches, methods, technique, procedures, course content/curriculum, classroom-management, etc) with the students. At the end of the semester, the students are demanded to be able to design and to do English Language Teaching (ELT) in the context of foreign language teaching by using appropriate method.

I have conducted teaching and learning process of TEFL by using discussion techniques for couples of years. The students were actively participated in the discussion: presenting the material in the classroom seminar, elaborating and exploring their understanding by questioning and arguing, etc. However, they still found difficulties in designing language teaching at the end of the semester. Most of the difficulties deal with how to establish English Language Teaching in foreign language setting: the government policy, the role of English for everyday communication, the students' responses, the students-students interaction, the teacher-students interaction, and the teaching methods. Among other difficulties, methods of teaching English as a foreign language is said to be, by my students, the most difficult one to decide in designing lesson plan.

In order to overcome these problems I tried to refresh the students' mind by bringing them into "the traditions" of critical pedagogy to criticize methods of teaching of English as a foreign language. One of the traditions of critical pedagogy is that it regards specific belief claims, not primarily as propositions to be assessed for their truth content, but as parts of systems of belief and action that have aggregated effects within the power structures of society. Therefore it asks first about these systems of belief and action, who benefits? (Giroux and McLaren, 1994).

Therefore, the atmosphere of the classroom discussions of my TEFL class were not focused primarily on the concept of the teaching methods, but on the educational effects or the benefits the students would get when the teacher applies certain method in his/ her English class.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

According to Monchinski (2008), quoting Freire, critical pedagogy is a praxis, constituting action and reflection. Praxis is thinking about why and what you are going to do before you do it and then reflecting on what you did, how you did it, and how it turned out. The above statement implies an understanding that critical pedagogy is dynamic process because it is also understood as a way of thinking about, negotiating and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structure of the school, and the social and material relation of wider community, society and nation-state (McLaren, 2006).

On the basis of the above discussion, critical pedagogy can be simply understood as a way of doing learning and teaching or teaching with an attitude (Akbari, 2008). In the framework of teaching with an attitude, the role of humanity in the social context is necessary to consider by the teacher in managing classroom activity. The reason is that, according to Akbari (2008), quoting Baynham, what happens in the classroom should end up making difference outside the classroom. English language teaching in Indonesia, in the context of teaching of English as a foreign language, aims at developing students competence in using the target language for communication.

On the other hand, system of communication exists in its social, cultural, ideological and political system. Therefore, a language is not just a system, but ideology as well. Semiotically, language is shaped and is infused with ideological, historical, and political symbols and relations (Pennycook, 2001). In language teaching, critical practice is about connecting the word with the world. Teaching a language, then, including English should be understood as teaching a new system of communication (Akbari, 2008).

The problem is that, the system of English language and its social system are different from that of bahasa Indonesia. Therefore, students of EED are hoped to be able to form their understanding and develop their concept of teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia. In my opinion, the concept of critical pedagogy is very useful for the students to criticize English teaching methods as the methods are designed within the social and cultural views which certainly different form that of Indonesia. Working in this framework, the students are motivated to think how the world of ideas in education relates to the world of reality in society (Akbari, 2008).

TEACHING LEARNING PROCESS OF TEFL CLASS

In the teaching and learning process of 2 credits of TEFL class under the framework of critical pedagogy approach, students of EED has the same position and role as the lecturer. Even the

students were grouped into several small discussion groups, the role and the position of each member of the group is the same. Critical pedagogy approach does not permit any act of domination and marginalization. All of the students had the same opportunity to think that the English language teaching which they had to design and the method they selected should provide significant space for positive social change (Akbari, 2008).

In other words, all students were responsible for criticizing teaching methods, by using their own interpretation by reference to their own understanding on how the method promotes students rights, provide similar space for the development of students' thinking and feeling, regard the use of students' L1 as one of the learning resources, and promote the use social and cultural norms of the society where the students live.

Practically, the students of my TEFLI class criticized the methods of English teaching by delivering several questions:

1. Does the method promote students' local culture? This question is important within two reasons. First, in any language teaching, culture is always thought to be very important part and used to enrich the course content to facilitate students to understand the meaning. However, almost all of course content designers think of transforming the target language culture with the reason that familiarity of the cultural norms of the target language will help learners to have successful communication with the native speakers of the target language (Akbari, 2008). This assumption, according to McKay (2003) is true for the learners who want to migrate to the speaking English countries, either to work or to study. In fact, most of Indonesian learners do not have plans to migrate to the English speaking countries, and therefore the inclusion cultural content of the target language is not necessary. The second, English has become the world lingua-franca which has developed as a language that geographically and communicatively doesn't refer to any specific national character.
2. Does the method regard Learners' L1 as a resource to be utilized? There is popular common assumption that the learners' L1 contributes negatively to the success of foreign language learning. Therefore, teachers should promote teaching and learning atmosphere in which the target language is mostly used by students and the students' L2 is rejected. This assumption should be re-evaluated because learners' L1, in fact, can be regarded as an asset that can facilitate communication in the L2. For example, L1 can be successfully used to maintain discipline in the classroom or to provide instruction for certain activities. It can also be used to explain complicated grammar points or abstract vocabulary items (Cook, 2001).
3. Does the method accommodate more of students' real life concern? Language learning is actually not a matter of linguistic learning, but also a matter of learning students' experience and needs. The method of teaching then, should be able to serve the social mobility and activity of the students (Akbari, 2008). In other words, the selected method should be the one which can facilitate the communicative needs of the learners regardless of their linguistic, economical, ethnic and political affiliations.

THE RESULT

At the end of the program, all of the students of TEFL class wrote portfolio of their learning activities. They described their understanding on the methods of teaching and how the methods

should be implemented in the context of teaching English as a foreign language. The interesting thing to notice here is that 77 % of the students reported that they had a new experience of learning activities which promote them to develop their thinking on language teaching method on their own ways, and not on the way the linguist thought about the method.

Dealing with the possibility of the use of local culture, 84 % of the student said that local culture is important aspect to consider in selecting appropriate method for the teaching learning activities. The reason is that language learners of a certain learning group may come from different societies with different cultural norms. The selected method, according to them should accommodate those norms properly. Above all, the use of English as the world lingua franca, according to them, does not have any relation with the domination of the culture of the speaking English society.

The use of students' L1 language for foreign language teaching and learning activities is also thought to be very useful by 66 % of the students. They agree with the opinion that students' L1 language greatly contributes successful interaction and communication between the teacher and students in classroom activity, especially to clarify some meanings dealing with difficult points of grammar use, vocabulary and language instruction.

Meanwhile, the choice of method in the framework of promoting real life concern is considered important by 81 % of the students. Teaching learning activities in a country, according to them, should be based on the real life concern of the nation. Education should be used to promote better life of a nation in all aspects and the use of a proper teaching method will help the teacher to act as the agent of positive change of the nation.

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