Being Reflective Student Tutors Through Community Service Programs

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ABSTRACT

This article reports the integration of a community service to one course of a master's program in one private university. Eighteen students were involved in the program that was designed to be part of learning the topics of the course. They had to prepare the syllabus, teach English vocabulary to elementary school students who joined one learning community in East Jakarta under the guidance of the lecturer. In addition to teaching, the students had to create modules on English vocabulary learning, and reflective essays on their teaching and module writing experiences. The aims of the integrated community service to learning program were to provide learning experiences that consist of real application of the English language learning and teaching theories that they have received in the classroom, and reflection upon those experiences. It is expected that the experiences will promote social awareness and contribution to providing free education services to those having limited access to private and profit-making learning centers. The article concludes by highlighting the importance of this model of integration.

Keywords — vocabulary teaching, project-based learning, reflective pedagogy

1. Introduction

The integration of a community service into a course in a higher education is stated in the Regulation of the Minister of Research and Technology Number 3 Year 2020 about the National Standard for Higher Education. Chapter 14 Article 5 of the regulation stipulates that learning can include lecture, tutorial, internship, research, and community service, among others. Such integration will help students learn from the real-life context and at the same time do a collaboration with communities that might benefit from the students' knowledge and skills [1]. Realizing the possibility of doing such integration in the course, namely the Approaches to English Language Learning (henceforth, AELL) - offered by Master Program in Applied English Linguistics of the Faculty of Education and Languages, Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia - the first author decided to make the community service (hereafter referred to as CS) part of students' learning experiences. This program is a continuation of the previous simultaneous two programs that were carried out in 2019 [2], [3]. In the first program, the first author did the CS by herself to see if it could work well and accepted by the community, namely *Bimbel Mita*. The second time, after being re-invited by the same community, she involved ten students of batch 2/2019 and 9 of batch 1/2023 taking the AELL course, making the CS integrated into the AELL course. In the last two programs, the student-tutor (henceforth, STs) of Batch 2019 were required to give free English vocabulary tutorials for Grade 3 and 4, and Batch 2023 to Grades 5 and 6 of BM. BM provides free English and Math lessons for children living in Duren Sawit, East Jakarta. It is expected that the teaching experience would give the STs, not all of whom are professional English teachers, a new and insightful understanding of learning outside the classroom.

2. Method

The integrated course and community service program consisted of two projects. The first one was conducted from February to March 2020 and the second one from August to October 2023 in *Bimbel Mita* (henceforth, BM),

Duren Sawit, East Jakarta. The tutorial was given to 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th graders. Each class consisted of four to six students. The STs were divided into eight groups in line with the above class. Each ST had to teach the English vocabulary at least twice. The tutorial agenda included teaching and writing the module for the four groups of BM students. Hence, first, each group of STs had to prepare the lesson plan and materials for teaching vocabulary before the tutorials. The STs were free to choose teaching methods and approaches for the tutorials from the course materials of AELL or other relevant sources. Second, during the teaching practices, every ST observed the class to adjust the materials for the next teaching section. Third, each ST had to make a teaching report and a brief reflection of their tutorials. In the last stage the STs of Batch 2019 had to create one vocabulary learning module for the students they taught. The module should contain activities and exercises that were relevant to the themes chosen by the STs group and were adjusted to BM students' level. Meanwhile, STs of Batch 2023 had to make a reflective paper upon their teaching experiences in BM. All the teaching, module writing, and reflective paper writing plan must be presented in the classrooms. That way, the STs gave themselves opportunities to make an advanced preparation as well as obtain feedback from the lecturer [4]. The first author (the lecturer) designed these community projects, provided advice and suggestions for the lesson plan, was present in all the tutorial sessions, and scaffolded the module writing and reflective paper writing through written feedback in Google documents and Teams assignments.

The onsite teaching sessions (see Pictures 1 to 4) were considered as the mandatory assignments for all STs. The module writing for Batch 2020 STs was the mid-term project, which were given written feedback by the first author and revised by each STs group before they were officially submitted to BM. The reflective paper for Batch 2023 STs was their mid and final term papers. The course adopted a project-based learning approach. It was expected that the STs would be able to do a reflection based on the teaching and report they

had made [5], but more importantly, they could be reflective teachers and practitioners [6].

The design of the AELL syllabus clearly showed an integration between teaching and a collaborative CS carried out by teacher and students [7]. The goal of the CS program was helping the BM students develop their English vocabulary knowledge and facilitating the STs to do reflective teaching as well as create theoretical based learning modules. For the STs, reflection can play a vital role in improving their teaching methods, to get some insight into the students and the profession as well as to create plans for necessary changes that students need. This program also aimed at raising the STs' social awareness [8].

Picture 1. The second uthor's tutorial session at BM

Picture 2. The third author's tutorial session at BM

Picture 3. The fourth author's tutorial session at BM

Picture 4. The fifth author's tutorial session at BM

3. Discussion

This section consists of three parts, the process of teaching BM students, writing the English vocabulary learning modules, and creating the reflective papers.

The Tutorial Sessions

During the CS, there were several teaching approaches and techniques implemented to teach the English vocabulary to BM students. Most BM students were beginner English learners who had little English language background. Thus, the main goal was to enable students understand basic vocabularies in English. The strategies approaches and techniques were intended to create a fun learning process to make them enjoy the English vocabulary learning [9]. One of the teaching techniques we used at that time was games It has been widely accepted that games can keep the students' attention to the lesson. Games can also help students to practice the communication skills.

Therefore, a fun learning experience through various exciting games, such as guessing games, crossword puzzles, and hangman was given [10], [11]. In the guessing game, the students were asked to guess the names of the objects or activities that were displayed in line with the materials taught before the game started. A guessing game was one of the simplest games used to teach the students key vocabulary related to activities done at home, for example, a variety of house chores.

The second game was a crossword puzzle, for which students had to guess the words that had been prepared on a large piece of paper containing several empty boxes that must be filled in [10]. They had to complete the empty boxes together based on hints for guessing the words in question. This game also

functions as a vocabulary exercise after students learned a number of new words

Another game used was the Hangman Games, which was similar to crossword puzzles. The purpose of this game was to create a pleasant atmosphere [11]. Despite the enjoyment that games provide to students, there were some minor shortcomings. Because the games were fun and created a fun learning situation, students sometimes got too excited, which made them reluctant to move to the next learning activities. Another flaw was the dominance of a few fast learners, who tended to compete with their classmates to win the games.

Besides games, there were other teaching tools, such as written cardboards, flashcards, real objects, booklets, diagrams, YouTube films and songs, and a variety of vocabulary worksheets, hence multimodal teaching of the young learners [12], [13]. It should be noted that audiovisual media enable the teachers to provide useful and interesting lessons since they contribute to dynamic and attractive teaching. However, tools can only function well with appropriate guidance of the STs.

Songs were used and introduced to students as learning tools. The use of songs in language teaching is not new. Songs have proved to be effective in English language learning and raising students' motivation [14] and listening skills [15]. Songs are good sources for learning the pronunciation, intonation, listening skills, and developing one's vocabulary and can attract students' interest for learning [16].

The Module Writing Process

The second stage of the CS program was the module-writing. After the tutorial was done, the STs worked together in the same group to plan and write English vocabulary learning modules for each level of BM students (see Picture 4). The first author provided the guidelines and suggestions during the planning of the module. She also provided written feedback for the module after it was submitted for the mid-term exam project. There were several stages for the module writing. The first step was the evaluation of the teaching materials prior to teaching BM students. The second one was the selection and organization of the topics for the module. The third stage was the syllabus planning, and finally, the collection or adoption of the materials from several sources, for instance, www.english page.com, agenda-web.org, en.islcollective.com.

As part of ensuring the authenticity of the materials [17], all the STs were asked to clearly state all the sources from which they took the images, exercises, songs, and other materials for the modules because the proper acknowledgment of the original authors/sources of the references make the materials authentic. The acknowledgment of the materials taken for the modules was part of the scoring rubric for the modules, which were not written for commercial purposes. It should be noted that authenticity refers to not only the learning materials which were not made for the purpose of learning, but also to the language used between real speaker and interlocutors, classroom interaction made by teachers and student, the kinds of assignments selected, language testing and culture.

The content of the module that can support the interaction between teachers and students can partially show the authenticity of the English teaching material. Hence, the module requires active participation from both facilitators and students to accommodate the learning process. The vocabulary and themes introduced were, therefore, social-related objects, which can help the beginners understand the meaning of the vocabulary

There were four modules written for each group of BM students taught by the STs (see Picture 5). One example that is explained here is Module 3A. The title is FEEL - Fun Excellent English Learning. To achieve the learning objectives in the module FEEL, it applied multimodal learning. Hence, to enhance vocabulary learning, various modes of learning were used in the module, such as flashcards, video, pictures, and games. The vocabulary introduced in the module are the high-frequency words that students can find easily at home and their surroundings (Willy Renandya, 2023).

Picture 5. Cover pages of modules source: the STs' modules-unpublished)

The Reflective Paper Writing Process

The third and final stage is the reflection and reflective paper writing. Reflection is "conscious, experientially informed thought, at times involving aspects of evaluation, criticality, and problem solving, and leading to insight, increased awareness, and/or new understanding" [5]. Thus, the STs had to write a personal reflective journal after they finish each of the teaching session. The content of their diary should not only fact, e.g., what they taught to BM students, how many students attended the lesson, or what the students did, but more importantly was their personal interpretation of the teaching experience. Thus, the STs were guided by these questions, i.e., (1) what they learned from the teaching sessions, (2) what they felt throughout the teaching sessions, (3) what challenges they had and what they did to solve them, and (4) what they wanted to improve should they be given a chance to teach at BM again. Based on their diaries, the STs would write their reflective paper.

The STs learned several essential matters from this project. First, they learned how to faithfully (or not faithfully) adopt a teaching method or approach in their class. Second, they learned how to write a learning module for young learners. They also went through a process of creation that textbook authors experience in general, including organizing a syllabus, selecting themes, making or finding appropriate materials, and the circle of reading, checking, editing, and revising the module in a teamwork. Third, they learned to practice a reflective teaching through the making of the teaching journal and reflective essay of their teaching or module writing. Finally, they enrich themselves intellectually, socially, and spiritually. Not only did they learn the theories from the classroom, but also the teaching in practice to the students who have limited access to the English language resources, which may have given them a sense of empathy and social awareness to give a continuous meaningful contribution to society [6].

4. Conclusion

To sum up, we have presented how programmed community service can be integrated into a particular subject in a tertiary education level. Though this kind of program needs careful and meticulous planning and continuous monitoring, it benefits the participants, both the students of BM and the STs. The former have a fun and gradual English learning experience from master students of a high-quality private university in Indonesia. In contrast, the latter has obtained real teaching experience, which teaches beginner English learners without a standardized English curriculum for the primary level. Hence, they also became eclectic as well as reflective teachers. Through the program, they experienced another demanding task of a teacher, namely writing an English vocabulary learning module and reflective paper, which not all English teachers dare to take because of the complexity of writing in its nature, let alone writing in the English language. The experiences will hopefully prepare themselves to be knowledgeable, emphatic, and creative agents of change.

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