

English Classroom Culture Reformation: How Can It be Done?

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Abstract: People say that the teaching of English in Indonesia is unsuccessful. Senior High School graduates, after having been studying English for six years, are unable to use the language in daily communication. One of the causes of the failure, in my opinion, is our classroom 'culture' that is not conducive to the learning process. In the classroom students are supposed to sit nicely, listen to the teacher attentively and are obedient to him. The teacher is the only one who is supposed to know everything and therefore becomes the one who dominates the classroom. If this culture, especially during the English class, is not reformed, I think, whatever efforts undertaken to improve the quality of the teaching will be futile. English classroom culture should be different from other classes since the objective of the teaching is also different. An English classroom, therefore, should be a lively one in which students have the chance to practise the language they are learning, and the teacher is the one who facilitates the learning process.

Key words: classroom culture, secondary school, English classroom

The teaching of English in Indonesia has been considered as a failure. This is due to the fact that Senior High School graduates who have been learning English for six years are unable use the language in daily communication. This is because of some reasons which are beyond the teachers capability to surmount. Sadtono (1997) says that the causes of the failure are, among others, (1) the limited number of hours for English classes, (2) the overcrowded classroom, (3) the expensive supplementary reading materials for most students, and (4) the social situation which is not particularly conducive to learning English as English is not spoken in the society.

In the junior and senior high school English is given four class hours per week, which are usually divided into two meetings, except for those who take

language as their major at the third year of Senior High School. During the Dutch colonization, English was taught three to four times a week (Sadtono, 1997). It means the number of hours given at that time was twice as what the students have now. That is why, the teaching of English nowadays is unsuccessful. Gatenby (1972) says that the success of a language class depends obviously upon the amount of time allocated to the language.

Another thing that makes the teaching of English in Indonesia fail is the number of students in the classroom. At present the average number of student in one classroom is around 40--50. This number is too big for a language class, foreign language class especially, since the ideal one is not more than twenty (Gatenby, 1972). If the number of students in a classroom is, let's say, forty-five then each student has only got two minutes time for practicing their English in each meeting. This is not enough for practicing a foreign language.

Education, especially elementary education, is now compulsory for all citizens. In our constitution it is also stated that all citizens have got the right to have education. It means that we prevent from wanting to go to school. The consequence of this is that education must be open to anybody regardless of his socio-economic status. This means that it is not only the haves who can go to school but those who are not lucky financially can also go to school. Therefore it is not surprising that not all students can afford the materials needed for improving their English. On the other hand, during the Dutch period, those who could go to school were 'selected': only the children of the rich and the 'priyayi' could go to school. That is why they could buy textbooks and supplementary reading materials so that they could improve their English by reading.

It is true that English is important. If we have a look at the advertisements in newspapers we will see that most employers are now looking for people who can speak or read or write English. This makes people eager to learn English and that is why English courses are now flourishing. But the fact that English is not spoken in the society makes it difficult for people to master the language.

The above facts cannot be easily overcome since they are all beyond the teachers' capability to surmount. But should we give up and let everything as it is? Since people must always try to do their best in doing things, English teachers should also find the most effective way in teaching English to the students. One way to achieve it is by reforming the classroom culture. English teacher should be

able to create conducive language classrooms at schools. But before talking about a conducive language classroom let us first have a look at our classroom culture.

TYPICAL INDONESIAN CLASSROOM CULTURE

There are some definitions about culture (Setyapranata, 1996). Some people understand culture as behaviours, such as language, gestures, customs, eating habits, family life, and education. Some others perceive cultures as products, such as literature, music, dance, arts, crafts, and artifacts. Sometimes, religions, beliefs, ideas, values, and institutions are also referred to as culture.

"Classroom culture" in this paper is everything which normally happens and is done by both teacher and students. It can be the way students react toward the teacher's offer, it can be the way how the teacher normally treats his students, it can also be the atmosphere of the classroom during lessons, and some other things which normally happen in the classroom.

It is actually difficult to decide which one can be taken as an example of Indonesian classroom culture since Indonesia is very wide and there are a number of cultures in each area. In Java, for example, the classroom culture in one public SMU may be different from that in another public SMU. Therefore, what is discussed in this paper is the classroom culture of a typical Indonesian classroom, especially in Surabaya, focusing only on some typical cases which may be considered as some of the obstacles to achieve the goals of the teaching of English. This, among others, includes teacher's perception on the situation in which students could learn a subject effectively, the way students react towards the teacher's questions or offers, and the way a teacher conducts his classroom.

There is often a misconception among teachers that learning may only take place when it is done seriously. That is why, when teaching, teachers should teach the students seriously and the students should also study seriously. If the students make jokes or chat or do not do something seriously, i.e. play games or sing a song, learning will not happen or if it happens the result will not be satisfactory. In one way the concept above might be true. However, some experts say that children may learn a language through games, songs, poetry, etc.

Teachers often consider that games, songs, and poems could only be used as end-of-term activities or something to fill the last five minutes of a lesson

(Hubbard et al., 1991). This conception makes teachers reluctant to exploit them as resources for teaching. Teachers tend to choose what is called "conventional" teaching materials when teaching languages including English. Research shows that not all textbook writers, who are mostly English teachers, present games, songs, and poetry in the textbooks they write (Lestari and Setiawan, 1997). This means that most teachers who use the textbooks do not use games, songs and poetry for teaching since most teachers teach their students whatever is presented in the textbooks. Teachers hardly ever use other teaching resources in addition to the textbook(s) they have chosen (Kusumo et al., 1997) although it is also stated in the syllabi that teachers are free to select any teaching materials which suit the objective(s), the students' need, and the students' interests.

It is stated in the 1994 English Syllabi, both for elementary and secondary schools, that teachers should be able to create such an atmosphere in which students feel free to use and practice the language they are learning, in this case English. In reality, what we usually see is that teachers talk all through the session while the students are listening to them or doing the assignment(s). Teachers, including English teachers, dominate the classroom. Research done in Elementary Schools in Central Java (Astika, 1996) shows that a large proportion of class time was used by the teacher (54.25%). The students' "share" of class time was very much smaller (14,9 %) and the rest (30%) was spent for "Silence and Confusion" categories. The above condition also happens in Junior and Senior High Schools.

Indonesian students are mostly passive. They do not react towards the teacher's presentations. This happens because they do not want to be considered "arrogant". They do not react towards the teachers' statements or questions, not because of their inability to give responses to the questions, but because they are "trained" to be quiet. They can not be blamed for being passive as they do that because our culture tells them to behave that way. Children in Indonesia, especially in Java, are supposed to be obedient to their parents or other older people. They are supposed to do what the older people ask them to do without any protest. In the classroom, they bring it with them and the result is that they become passive students. They only do what the teacher asks them to do. Astika (1996) says that in English classrooms the students' purposes of using the language are to repeat after the teacher in drill practice (9.28 %), to respond (4.85 %) and to initiate ideas (0.77%).

In Indonesia teachers are considered to be the ones who know everything. This perception makes people think that teachers are superior creatures. Being superior, they are supposed to "govern" the classroom. In the classroom, teachers ask questions to the students, give explanation, give directions, and prepare teaching aids and the students write/do exercises and repeat after the teacher (Astika, 1996). Teachers spent more time "getting the job done" than sharing the students' feelings or encouraging/motivating the students to enjoy the lesson. Teachers are more concerned with materials, neglecting the emotional needs of the students.

CREATING A CONDUCIVE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

What is essential in learning a language is that the language being studied should be, as far as possible, the sole medium of communication in any given environment (Gatenby, 1972). It is true that students' English, especially at the elementary level, is still poor. However, it does not mean that we must not use English when teaching them. It is recommended that English be used during English lessons so that students get acquainted with it. The teacher should also "tolerate" the students' mistake/error when they make one(s) in speaking though it does not mean that the teacher must not correct it. It is important that the students' mistake be corrected but the way to do it must not make the students discouraged to use the language. The teacher, in this case, should be wise. He should not act as a judge in court who decides that this is right and that is wrong.

As mentioned previously the teaching of English in Indonesia has been a failure. The government has done a number of efforts to eliminate such a failure; among others by sending teachers to up-grading courses, introducing new curriculum, providing textbooks, etc. Those efforts will not make the teaching of English more successful if the classroom culture is not changed since Indonesian classroom culture is not conducive to learning, especially learning a foreign language. Therefore to make the teaching of English successful English teachers should be able to create an atmosphere in which students have the opportunity to learn to use the language.

Language is basically a means of communication. That is why, in the classroom, teachers should give the students opportunity to use the language. It is not easy to make the students speak in English; however, teachers can use games

and some other "non-conventional" materials in addition to the materials presented in the textbooks in order to make the students speak or use the language as Gatenby (1972) says that in order to be learnt a language must be used. Such kinds of materials are suggested to be used in the classroom as some researches show that games, songs, riddles, and poetry can be exploited in language classrooms to increase the students achievement in all language skills and to master the language elements (Lee, 1995 and Maley, 1987). The exploitation of such kinds of materials will make the students know that the language they are learning does exist and they can use them in daily activities. They can also increase the students' motivation in learning. In addition to that, competition in games can encourage students to help each other in group (Brown, 1977).

Using games, songs, quizzes and poems in teaching can make the students feel relaxed while studying. It is important to make the students enjoy themselves in the classroom so that they can optimize their performance. However, students should not be entertained in the classroom. Therefore, the teacher should be careful in selecting the materials so that what is presented in the classroom is well suited with the syllabus.

The 1994 English Syllabi uses the *Kebermaknaan* Approach and the materials should be presented on the basis of the theme provided. That is why, when a teacher makes a lesson plan he should use the theme as his point of departure. Any activities done in the classroom should be directed towards the theme discussed. Let us take an example that the theme to be presented in SMP is 'daily needs' (kebutuhan sehari-hari) and the sub-theme is 'recreation' (rekreasi). Instead of giving an example of how to converse if one is asking for information, when a certain place of interest opens and closes and after that the teacher asks the students to produce similar conversation, the teacher can use games to make the students practice communicating in English. For example, he can use a game called "Planning a Day Out" (see Appendix 1) taken from *Elementary Communication Games* created by Hadfield (1984). As the game is not especially created for EFL students in Indonesia, it would be better if the teacher adapts it so that it will be meaningful for the students. The adaptation made covers the setting (the city/town should be the one familiar to the students), the names of the places of interest, the opening and closing times, and the title of the plays or films. Using this game will make the students speak with their friends in English. While watching the students play the games, once in a while, the teacher can remind the students of the gram-

matical mistakes made. In this way, he is able to teach both reading (when the students read the role cards), speaking (when the students do the activity) listening (when the students listen to their friends) and grammar (saying times) at one time.

Another material that can be used in teaching English is riddle, that is puzzling question, statement or description, intended to make a person use his wits. There are a number of riddles that can be used for teaching English at all levels. For advanced students, "Dingbat" may be challenging. For those who are still in the pre-advanced or intermediate level some riddles presented in some *Forum* journals may be suitable (the compilation is available under the title of "*The Lighter Side of TEFL*"). For elementary level, other kinds of riddle might be used, for example, describing objects (Hadfield and Hadfield, 1990), a riddle similar to that of "Apa ini, apa itu" quiz on RCTI (see Appendix 2). When a teacher presents the theme of "At School" (*Di Lingkungan Sekolah*), he may use this riddle to encourage the students to write and speak in English. However, when a teacher uses this riddle he should adapt it first because (1) some of the examples may be difficult for SMP students and (2) the objects available in the object-card varies. Thus the teacher should leave those which are not suitable with the theme and only use the ones which are commonly seen at school so that they will match with the theme discussed. He may also add some objects if he think it is necessary. This riddle will make the students write (while creating the riddles), speak (while discussing it with the group and say it to the "opponents") and listen (while listening to the opponents' riddles).

Another alternative that can be used for teaching English in a more lively way is song. Song can be used for teaching English as most students love songs. There are some advantages of using songs in the teaching of English, among others are (Sabardi, 1995): (1) they can be used as alternative materials for the students to learn English outside the classroom, (2) they can be used as a linguistic exposure for the students as they are sung by native speakers, (3) they give the students chance to learn rhythm, intonation, idioms, or grammar, and (4) they introduce English culture. Let us take this song as an example:

All Kinds of Everything

Snowdrops and daffodils, butterflies and bees
Sailboats and fishermen, things of the sea
Wishing wells, weddin' bells, early morning dew

All kinds of everything remind me of you
 Seagulls and aeroplane things of the sky
 Winds that go howling', breezes that sigh
 City sights, neon lights, grey skies or blue
 All kinds of everything remind me of you
 Summer time, winter time, spring and autumn too
 Monday, Tuesday, every day, I think of you
 Dances, romances, things of the night
 Sunshine and holidays, postcards to write
 Budding trees, autumn leaves, snow flakes or dew
 All kinds of everything remind me of you

This song can be presented when the theme discussed is "Geography", especially when the sub-theme is *Keadaan Alam*. Using this song the teacher can introduce the students to the four seasons that we, Indonesian, do not have and the condition of nature during a certain season. In addition, what people normally do during a certain season can also be described. By dropping some words from the lyric, the teacher could ask the students to guess what words are missing from the context while listening to the song.

We understand that if we use games and songs as some alternatives for teaching English the classroom may be very noisy and this may disturb other classrooms. To avoid such a thing teachers, then, should choose the games that can be played in small groups so that the noise could be minimized.

CONCLUSION

There is reluctance every where to sacrifice tradition (Gatenby, 1972). However, if we want to make the teaching of English successful, whether we like it or not, we should reform our classroom culture. As language is basically a means of communication students should be given the opportunity to use the language. In an English classroom, students as the subjects, must be active and the teacher as a facilitator should be able to create such an atmosphere in which students could use the language being studied without any hesitation.

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APPENDIX 1

Planning a Day Out

(Taken from Hadfield, 1984)

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Type of activity : | - pair work |
| | - information gap |
| Function practiced: | asking about opening and closing times |
| Exponent : | - What's on ... tonight? |
| | - What time does ... open/close/start/finish? |
| Lexical areas : | times, public buildings and facilities |
| Essential vocabulary: | museum, market, art gallery, library, shopping centre, theatre, cinema, days, times |

How to use the game:

- Copy a role-card and a map for every student in the class.
- The students should sit in pairs facing each other across a table.
- Give each student an appropriate role-card and a map. Student A has a list of things to do and see on a visit to York. Student B has a guide to entertainment and facilities in York.
- The object of the game is for student A to find out what the possibilities are and to plan the day. To do this, student A must ask student B for information about opening/closing/starting/ finishing times of the shops, museums, plays in York, in order to decide what can and cannot be done in the time available. Student A must draw in a route of the day's wanderings on the map.

It is Tuesday 4 December.

You are going to York for the day.

You arrive at 9.30 am.

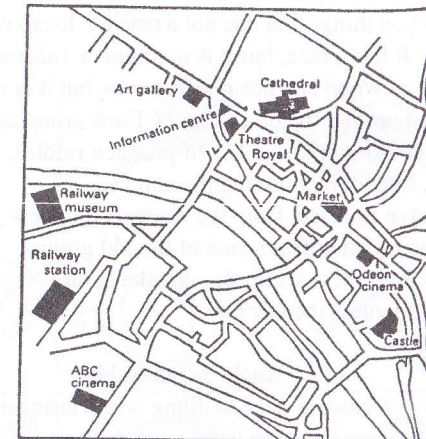
The last train home leaves at 22.35.

You want to:

visit the castle

You want to plan your day, so ring up York Tourist information Centre and ask about opening and closing time. Decide what you are going to do and when you are going to do it. you may not be able to do everything!

Draw in your route on the map.



APPENDIX 2

Riddles

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Type of activity: | - making the familiar strange |
| | - audience and contest guessing |
| Function practiced: | - describing objects |
| Useful language: | - has/have/has got/have got |
| | - adjectives for physical description; |
| | - simple present; |
| | - when ..., if; |
| | - feels/smells/tastes/sounds/looks like |
| Lexical areas : | - adjectives for colour, texture, shape, size, length, weight, pattern, materials, etc. |

How to use the activity

- Do this activity with groups of three or four.
- Take or copy of the Riddles sheet for each group, and enough copies of the object-cards for there to be three or four for each group.

- Cut up the object-cards and put them in a hat or bag.
- Cut the answers off the Riddles sheet, then hand out the Riddles sheets to the groups and ask them to try and work out what is being described in each riddle.
- Introduce a few 'home-made' riddles, e.g.:
 1. This is a cylindrical object made of white paper. It is full of dead leaves. (*cigarette*)
 2. A round golden object with a hole in the middle. (*ring*)
 3. It can tell you things, but it is not a teacher. It can wake you up, but it is not your wife. It has a face, but it is not human. (*alarm clock*)
 4. It is made of wood and has many leaves, but it is not a tree. (*book*)
- Now hand out around the object cards. Each group should take three or four. The group should work together to produce riddles, describing objects they have picked, but not mentioning the names.
- When they have finished, from the students into new groups so that each new group has one member from each of the old groups.
- The students in the new group should take in turns to read their riddles to each other and try to guess the answers.

Anglo Saxon Riddle

A creature came shuffling where there sat
 many wise men in the meeting place
 He had two ears and only one eye
 He had two feet and twelve hundred heads
 A back, two hands, and a belly.
 Two shoulders, and sides, a neck
 And two arms. Now tell me his name
 On the way, a miracle: water, become bone
 The deep sea fed me
 Waves covered me as I rested on my bed.
 I have not feet and frequently open my mouth
 To the flood. Sooner or later some man
 Will consume me, who cares nothing for my shell.
 With the point of his knife he will pierce me through
 Ripping away the skin from my sides, and straightway
 Eat me, uncooked as I am

Children's Riddles:

- What is black and white and red all over?
- What goes up when the rain comes down?

- What goes up but never comes down?
- What goes up a chimney down, but can't come down a chimney up?
- What gets wet when drying?
- What gets bigger the more you take from it?
- Walks on four feet
 On two feet, on three
 The more feet it walks on
 The weaker it be
 A wee wee house

