

IS SOEGIJAPRANATA CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY READY FOR INTERNATIONAL CLASSES?

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Abstract: Soegijapranata Catholic University which is one of the leading private universities in Semarang, Central Java, is planning to run International Classes. The idea of establishing the International Classes should be supported by good preparation of all components involved in the teaching and learning process. Running a class in English will create some new and perhaps unexpected problems. As the first step in preparing the International Classes, Soegijapranata Catholic University has held a teacher training for International Classes Preparation. The teacher training could be used as a reflection to answer the question : Is Soegijapranata Catholic University ready for the International Classes ?

Key words : International classes, Soegijapranata Catholic University, teaching and learning process.

The importance of English language as an international level communication means have made a lot of universities in non-English speaking countries start introducing English language as the introductory language in the process of knowledge transferring besides the first or the national language used in those countries. Indonesia, which is one of the world developing countries in Asia is also facing the new globalisation era in which English would be a 'must' for those specially involved in the country's development from academic sector.

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Why English is a must ? As we can not avoid, most knowledge is transferred from the more advanced countries by means of a language. Sapir (1921:8) says that language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. Meanwhile, in Essay on Language, Hall (1968:58) also defines language as an institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral auditory symbols.

English has been spoken as an international language by nearly three hundred millions people in the United States of America, Canada, Britain, Ireland, Australia, The Caribbean, and many other places (Leech and Svartvik, 1974:22). Considering the other function of a language to build social relationship (Spolsky,1998:3) English has been also used more intensively in non English speaking countries including Indonesia.

For some countries like Indonesia, English is not spoken as the second language. It is still a foreign language which is only spoken by certain people. Therefore, there are many Indonesian people who are not familiar or even do not understand English at all. It is a fact that to make the people familiar with English is not an easy task.

Considering the position of English as a foreign language, Indonesian people learn English for numerous reasons. However, the most reason is because English is in the school curriculum. It is the government policy to put English as a compulsory lesson in Junior and Senior High School. Therefore, in fact, most Indonesian have started learning English since they were in Junior high School or even elementary school.

Ignoring the fact that Indonesian people have started learning English since they were young, some learners say that English is a difficult subject. Usually, most learners who say that English is difficult do not have a good motivation in learning English which results in unsatisfied achievement. It can be understood since sometimes this situation makes some students work under pressure. They have to learn English because they have no other choice.

Meanwhile, some other English learners have better motivation to learn English. They usually go to English courses to learn and improve their English. This group usually has certain targets to reach dealing with their willingness to learn English. They may have a plan to work , study or visit other countries where they have to use English to communicate with others. Some of these people may be interested in learning other cultures which requires them to master English first.

Out of those two facts about English learning described above, university as the formal academic institution have duties to prepare qualified human resources who have capability both in their field and English language so that after they graduate they are ready to compete in the real world either in national or international level.

Soegijapranata Catholic University, one of the private leading universities in Semarang, Central Java, is also preparing its graduates to be competitive scholars. Non- English department students must take English in the Centre Of Language Training for two semesters. Those students will be given English for General Purposes and English for Specific Purposes. Meanwhile, the English department students are supposed to use English actively in their classes because the subjects are delivered in English.

Considering the fact that Soegijapranata Catholic University has been one of the leading universities in Semarang and it also has the Faculty of Letters with its English Department, the idea of establishing international classes at this university is just a great idea. However, there is still a big question hanging around this idea : **Is Soegijapranata Catholic University ready for the International Classes ?** Anyway, this is just a brilliant idea that should be supported by all the university components including the lecturers, the students, and the given materials.

Perhaps it is better to analyse the components mentioned in the previous paragraph before the university really starts the international classes. It is true that to run the international classes, Soegijapranata Catholic University must have excellent students with good English. However, perhaps, the more important thing to prepare in the first step is the lecturers who will be actively taking important role in the teaching process. We should admit that not all the lecturers in this university have good capability in English language. In average, those lecturers' basic English is not bad, in fact, most of them have good basic English although they are not active users. However, university needs to give a kind of teacher training for them considering most of them have no experience to teach in English.

The Rector of the university recommended the Faculty of Letters to prepare and hold an English course in International Classes preparation for non-English Department lecturers. Therefore, the Faculty of Letters held the program from April until July 2001. The participants who came from numerous faculties were grouped in small classes according to their field background and Placement Test achievement.

Basically, the participants were put in two different kinds of classes :

- a. **EAP Class (English for Academic Purposes Class)**
This class was for those whose English was quite good and ready to deal with the preparation for the international classes itself.
- b. **EGP Class (English for general Purposes Class)**
This class was for those whose English still needed 'help' or in other words, they still needed another preparation before they went with the International Class Preparation. The participants in this class got integrated course material to improve their language ability.
Actually the names EAP and EGP given to those classes were only to differentiate and to put the participants with the same level in the same class.

What is interesting to see in each class is the participants numerous education background. Some of the participants were SI graduates, some were Masters from Indonesia and the rest were Masters from abroad. Another fact is almost all of them have ever taken English course before.

The program was designed as well to give the participants more chance to speak English because the English skill which was going to be emphasized in this program was speaking. Each participant was given a chance to demonstrate their ability in using English through class presentation and group discussion.

For about three months and a half the participants came intensively to this training and worked with these following materials:

- a. English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia
- b. Autonomy and Independence in Language learning
- c. Presentation Techniques
- d. Laboratory Work
- e. Integrated course
- f. Lesson plan
- g. Microteaching

Microteaching is used a technique for professional reflection which is expected to help teachers get a better understanding about the process of teaching and learning. Microteaching also provides teachers with opportunities to explore and reflect on their own and others' teaching styles and to acquire new teaching techniques.

Essam Hanna Wahba in her article about Microteaching stated that : Besides being an effective technique for professional growth, microteaching as a tool for reflection, helps teachers scrutinize their own teaching in order to discover their strength and weakness. Reflecting on their own teaching styles enables teachers to focus on certain areas of teaching and to view them from different perspectives. It also makes teachers conscious of developing their own skills and strategies in order to understand their teaching. Through microteaching teachers are able to pursue self-initiated, self-directed, and self-observed growth. This growth comes about because teachers are able to criticize, either positively or negatively, their own work" (Forum, volume 37, Number 4, October-December 1999)

During the teacher training, the writer (who also taught both EAP and EGP Classes) observed and finally found that the achievement in language progress gained by the participants was not the same from one to another. Ignoring the different basic language acquiring between the students in EAP and EGP class, in almost every class, there were four groups of learners :

- a. learners who were very good (fluent) in speaking but weak in written English
- b. learners who did not speak a lot but did well in written English
- c. learners who performed well both in spoken and written English
- d. learners who were weak both in spoken and written English

Learners who were in group *a* and *c* were usually easy to express their ideas orally even spontaneously. These groups always enjoyed every class discussion and individual presentation. They were also very good in answering questions and giving reasons. Some of the learners in these groups were those who got their masters abroad.

Meanwhile, those who were in group *b* would perform well in class presentation if they were given a chance to prepare it before. They might be good in delivering their presentation but they often got nervous when somebody interrupted their presentation or gave them 'unexpected' questions. They hardly participated in class discussion except they had to answer questions given to them by their colleagues.

Learners who were in group *d* often complained that they could not follow the sessions. Some of them were lack of self-confidence, some had

no talent in language and some others were just lazy to improve their English by having self-study instead of merely rely on the tutors in class.

Learning from those groups of learners above, it is interesting trying to see some issues behind the existence of those groups in every language class. At least, the writer finds two factors which can be the reasons for the existence of those groups of learners:

LANGUAGE LEARNING BACKGROUND

- a. Indonesian people especially the Javanese are very self-conscious when asked to express their view or opinion in public. It is also true in language class although their English abilities are comparatively good. Some historians said that before Indonesia gained its independence in 1945, it had been colonized for such a long time by other countries which made Indonesian people lose their freedom including the freedom to express their own ideas. This fact also drives the language learners to a situation when they prefer not to speak in English because they are afraid of making mistakes and being ridiculed.
- b. The freedom to speak and the independence in learning is also much influenced by the political system of the country. In liberal countries, people are easier to express their ideas and arguments while in a country like Indonesia sometimes people are afraid to express their own view. Therefore, there have not been many learners who have a self-study. They tend to wait and rely on their tutors or teachers in class.
- c. The teaching of English in Junior and Senior High School is very book-centred in which the learners learns a lot about grammar and reading from a text book. Speaking practice is only done through text reading. The worst thing, the teachers always delivered English in Indonesian. This fact makes English learners tend to be English passive users.
- d. English has been learnt as a science not a skill. Students (learners) tend to memorize the English grammar as a formula when they are having a test. The final target of learning English is to be successful in the test. This kind of learning has made English learners weak in speaking and listening but perhaps good in grammar.

LEARNING STYLES

Reid (as cited in Kang,1999:6) defined learning style as internally based characteristics of individuals for the intake or understanding of new information. Further, Reid also said that people learn differently and at different paces because of their biological and psychological differences.

The choice of learning style by a learner can stimulate him/her to achieve the best progress. However, since learning style is also influenced by psychological factors, the achievement gained by a learner can not be guaranteed. Learners who enjoy having a lot of conversation and speaking practice will tend to be English active users. These learners are usually those who are easy going and extrovert. On the other hand, learners who enjoy reading and writing practice will tend to be English passive users. The combination of those learning styles would contribute a lot to the best achievement by learners.

Out of the facts described above, actually as suggested by Gardner, every human being can apply the multiple intelligences when learning a language. Gardner said :

It is of the utmost importance that we recognize and nurture all of the varied human intelligences, and all of the combinations of intelligences. If we recognize this, I think we will have at least a better chance of dealing with the many problems we face in the world"

(Forum, Volume 36/1998)

Gardner himself suggested eight intelligences which should be applied when learning a language which is called **Multiple Intelligences** :

a. **Bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence**

The ability to use the body to express ideas and feelings to solve problems.

b. **Intrapersonal intelligence**

The ability to understand ourselves-strength, weakness, moods, desires, and intentions.

c. **Interpersonal intelligence**

The ability to understand another person's moods, feelings, motivations, and intentions.

d. **Linguistic intelligence**

The ability to use words effectively both orally and in writing

- e. **Logical-mathematical intelligence**
The ability to use numbers effectively and reasons well including the principles of cause and effect
- f. **Musical intelligence**
The ability to sense rhythm, pitch, and melody
- g. **Spatial intelligence**
The ability to sense form, space, colour, line, and shape
- h. **Naturalist intelligence**
The ability to recognize and classify plants, minerals, animals, and all variety of flora and fauna.

By applying those multiple intelligences, some problems dealing with language learning could be overcome or at least minimized.

The teacher training program for non-English Department lecturers which has been held recently at the Faculty of Letters Soegijapranata Catholic University, could be used as a reflection to answer the question : Is Soegijapranata Catholic University Semarang ready for International Classes ? The four groups of English learners as mentioned and discussed above would be possibly found in the international classes.

Learning from the teacher training program for International Classes preparation, it is really not a bad idea for Soegijapranata Catholic University to prepare the best teaching and learning strategies for the International Classes. Then, the success of the International Classes entirely depends on all the components involved in the teaching and learning process and so does the answer to the question hanging around the idea of having the international classes.

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A large, stylized logo for 'Celt' in a light blue, bubbly font with a white outline and a slight drop shadow. The letters are rounded and interconnected, giving it a friendly, modern appearance.