

# Encouraging Students to Create their ESP Course Design Using Project-Based Instruction

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**Abstract**— This paper presents some steps of teaching EFL students to create an ESP course design in their ESP class by applying a project-based instruction (PBI). This study was conducted due to the background of the students' low achievement in understanding ESP subject. The purpose was that by using PBI students would get increased achievement with both the knowledge and skill about the principles of EFL teaching for ESP. Specifically, they were expected to have ESP knowledge, skills of creating a class design based on the learners' need analysis, and capability of writing a set of relevant ESP teaching materials. This was a classroom implementation upon a compulsory course subject named English for Specific Purposes. PBI was chosen due to its principle, namely a classroom activity that focuses on students. It is believed that it enables them to get deeper knowledge through active exploration of real-world challenges and problems. The aim of the teacher to use PBI in her classroom was to create a different atmosphere in the teaching learning as to refer to the learning outcomes. The class applied four stages of PBI: speculation, designing the project activities, conducting the project activities, and evaluation. Employing twenty-seven seventh semester students of English Department of Wijaya Kusuma Surabaya University working in groups, the study referred to two-cycled classroom action research design. By doing so, the students showed significant improvement in their achieving scores representing the learning outcomes of the course.

**Keywords**— *Project Based Instruction, English for Specific Purposes, Course Design*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as a compulsory subject to college students, especially those who study at the teacher training faculty, requires not only knowledge transferring but also how-to-create-a-class-design skill. Students of study program of English Language Education Wijaya Kusuma Surabaya University have to accomplish some pre-requisite subjects before they enroll for ESP class. Students should have already finished taking subjects such as EFL Teaching-Learning Strategies, Instructional Design, and Language Testing. This refers to how they will deal with ESP's four absolute characteristics

(Stevens, 1988): design to meet specified needs of the learner, related contents to particular disciplines, occupations, and activities, language appropriateness to the activities (syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, etc.), and a contrast with General English (GE). As a result, at the end of the class, the students, therefore, will be expected to have both knowledge about the principles of ESP, skill of creating a class design based on the learners' need analysis, and capability of writing a set of relevant ESP teaching materials.

However, traditional method (teacher-centred) applied in such classroom resulted in failure to achieve students' understanding towards the principles of ESP. As it was noted, mid-term test was provided to measure the students' understanding ESP principles. It was presented in an essay-typed written test that was performed individually. The students' achievement in understanding ESP principles and its application in EFL classroom, however, was considered to be under the passing grade of learning outcomes, which was determined in the basic course outline of the course subject. The passing grade was 70 while the students' mean of mid-term test was 53.59. It was a quite far from what was expected to fulfill the criterion of learning outcome.

The pre-cycle research showed that teaching strategy was one point to ponder that concerned the failure. The learning environment, for example, contributed to students' understanding. They were only provided with some lengthy texts and literatures to read for the exam. This even became worst as their reading ability was poor. Although the teacher had already provided them with some summary text in PPT slides, it seemed that it wouldn't help. It turned out to be true that they didn't even browse them. Next, the strategy did not encourage students to deal with primary data and they had just had things to do with text books to read. In short, the class were not engaged with authenticity and real world learning. Then, the class seemed to reproduce the knowledge rather than to develop life skills. As a result, crucial elements of learning like social negotiation, collaboration, and experience were not observable.

The 21st century education poses individuals or learners at dynamic competition one another. This leads to a premise that

the skilled and well-educated will win the competition. To reach the point at which such premise can be fulfilled, life skill-oriented education, competence-based learning strategy, and process-based learning are badly required on the purpose of producing worth gaining product. By referring to that, among those recommended learning strategies, project-based learning or project-based instruction (henceforth PBI) appears as a solution to the problem previously described above.

According to Buck Institute for Education (2003), PBI is a systematic teaching method that engages learners in acquiring knowledge and skills through an extended inquiry process structured around complex, relevant questions, carefully designed products, and authentic tasks. It is simply a kind of experiential learning that refers to a principle of "learning by doing". By way of this model, learners will get their understanding upon specific knowledge after they experience or do something (Kotti, 2008:32).

Referring to a number of experts, Fragoulis and Tsiplakides (2009) summarized several benefits of PBI for the learners in terms of learning second and foreign languages. They are confidence and independence, self-esteem and positive attitudes toward learning, autonomy, increased social, cooperative skills, and group cohesiveness, improved language skills, motivation and enjoyment, problem solving and high order critical thinking skills, and expectancy of success. The role of teacher in PBI is not dominant. Instead, he or she puts himself or herself as a guide, advisor, coordinator, and facilitator. The characteristic of the class can be described as from teacher to students: from working alone to working in groups. In accordance with such learning principle, there are four general stages of PBI (Kriwas, 1999 in Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009): speculation, designing the project activities, conducting the project activities, and evaluation.

Speculation stage is characterized with teacher-student activity in choosing the topic for the project they are going to accomplish. This stage is also meant to arouse students' interest and develop a good atmosphere in which they can speculate and investigate things appealing in their project so that they will understand the working process.

Next is the design. In this stage, grouping and role assigning take place. The groups decide the method to apply, discuss the sources of information, and set up activities. The better organized and more analytical the structuring of the activities, the easier and faster the research will be conducted (Fragoulis, 2008 in Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009).

Then, conducting the project activities requires the groups to implement the activities they have already put on in the previous stage. They do gathering, processing, and categorizing information. At times, students can consult the teacher since some problems may appear, such as information and feedback, cooperation among group members, personal relation, and possible changes in group composition.

Finally, evaluation stage is required since it is the assessment of the students' activities and discussion about whether the goals have been achieved, implementation of the process, and final products (Brinia, 2006:82 in Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009).

By referring to what is described above, the study was aimed to find out whether the students of study program of English Language Education Wijaya Kusuma Surabaya University could meet their learning outcome of ESP subject by implementing PBI.

Based on the explanation above, the research questions were formulated as follows:

1. Can students increase their achievement in ESP course subject by using PBI?
2. What are the steps of PBI that enable the students to increase achievement in ESP course subject?

## II. METHOD

This was a two-cycled classroom action research study that employed twenty-seven seventh semester students of English Department of Wijaya Kusuma Surabaya University taking their compulsory course subject, ESP. The students were put into two big groups called English for Academic Purposes or EOP and English for Occupational Purposes or EAP groups. Each of them were divided again into smaller ones to indicate which ESP class they were going to choose. For example, an EOP group had three other smaller groups under the names of English for Secretary, English for Doctors, and English for Chefs. As a result, each smaller group consisted of four to five members. Totally, there were six smaller groups: three EAP groups and another three EOP groups.

The study employed observation, tests, and interview. To put PBI into practice, the following is the description of how the four stages were applied in the classroom.

### A. Speculation

In this stage, teacher started with an inquiry and led students to a discussion upon a project. She began with a topic. It was an ESP class design. Students were directed to think about the principles of ESP by making them answer questions and filling up the empty diagram written on the white-board. The diagram depicted a relationship among elements of ESP class design: specified needs of the learner (learning goals), contents, language knowledge and language skills, and some features, which are in contrast with General English (GE).

The teacher, furthermore, asked the students about : a) what should be required in order to get the knowledge of the participants so that they could determine their learning goals; b) what instruments they needed to get the data; c) what they would do after they got the data; d) how they would manage the data to get to their practical summary of the learners' need/learning goals; and e) whether they had to create teaching material based on the summary. In response to those questions, there appeared to be the need of need analysis upon the participants, a syllabus, and teaching material.

As a result, there were three projects to complete: creating a need analysis, setting up a syllabus, and writing a teaching material (handbook).

### *B. Designing the Project Activities*

After doing the speculation as described in the previous stage, the class was divided into two big groups: a group of EAP and a group of EOP. Each group should accomplish the three tasks as mentioned in the stage of speculation. Teacher helped the students with the outline of the projects, for example, to complete task 1 (creating a need analysis) students would have to locate the respondents, to set up a set of questionnaire, arrange a schedule to distribute the the questionnaire, gather and process the data, and write a conclusion. For the next task, setting up the syllabus, students had to carefully arrange the elements of syllabus and describe each of them in such a way that it would become a well-organized syllabus. They should think and write about what to put in the goals of learning, the materials that fitted the goals, the method of teaching to apply in order to reach the goals of learning, the choice and use of teaching-learning media, and the evaluation that could measure the learners' competence by referring to the accomplishment of goals of learning. Finally, based on the syllabus they made, students proceeded with the third task, writing a handbook. In this task, students collaborated to create a well-designed handbook for their ESP class.

### *C. Conducting the Project Activities*

In this stage, students gathered, processed, and categorized information. Teacher encouraged them to use a questionnaire as instrument to collect the data. They applied their social, cooperative skills, group cohesiveness, language skills, problem solving and high order critical thinking skills, and expectancy of success. In doing Task 1, they had to find specific participants or respondents that fit their project, EOP or EAP. A group of English for Doctors (EOP), for instance, should get at least 10 doctors to complete their questionnaire. Then, they had to do the data tabulation as well as summary and conclusion.

After they finished with Task 1, they continued with Task 2, writing a syllabus. By referring to the summary and conclusion they had already made in the previous task, students organized the data into a syllabus format. The format consisted of learning goals (learner's competence to meet), materials, teaching strategy, media used, and assessment. Teacher offered two styles of creating the syllabus, namely descriptive and tabling. Most of the students preferred the tabling.

Finally, they went on with the handbook or the teaching material when the syllabus was ready. They created the handbook by referring to the syllabus. The handbook should contain title, author, table of content, units, knowledge and skills parts, exercises, and references. They should also consider appropriate book cover, pictures, diagrams, maps, etc, and colour arrangement. When this handbook was ready it was a time for them to accomplish their project.

In the end they had to prepare for their class presentation to report what they had already worked out with their project.

### *D. Evaluation*

Students presented their project and teacher with the other students gave questions and opinions. At this stage, they still had a chance for a revision before they had to submit their report and handbook. Finally, the students got their written test (essay-typed) again.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research showed that significant improvement was achieved after the second cycle was applied. The students, working with their friends in group and following the teacher's instructions, successfully applied PBI and their scores represented their learning competence of the subject, ESP. The following is the description of the activities through cycles: pre-cycle, first cycle, and second cycle.

### *A. Pre-Cycle Data*

Before the first cycle of the research was carried out, a preliminary study or pre-cycle research had already been conducted. It was the students' mid-term test results. The goal of mid-term test was to measure the students' achievement in understanding ESP principles and its application in EFL classroom. It was an essay-typed test and 70 was a passing score to determine students' competence. Unfortunately, the mean of mid-term test showed only 53.59. It was, of course, out of the criterion of learning outcome.

### *B. The First Cycle*

The first cycle proved to be a failure since the mean of the test result indicated less than 70. It was only 65.96. It means that only did 65% of the participants gain their passing score.

Reflection reported that based on the observation data, one of the groups did not complete Task 1, Constructing Need Analysis. Besides, some members of one group did not appear so that Task 2 was inappropriately worked out. As a results, one group submitted incorrect task.

### *C. The Second Cycle*

In this cycle, the students showed significant improvement in their achieving scores representing the learning outcomes of the course. Students gained increased achievement in both knowledge and skill about the principles of EFL teaching for specific purposes. They got mean score as much as 76,78.

Reflection reported that all groups completed Task 1, Constructing Need Analysis and the disappearing members of one group were called and problem solved so that they could submit Task 2 successfully.

Meanwhile, the steps of PBI that enable the students to increase achievement in ESP course subject followed the ones proposed by Fragoulis and Tsiplakides (2009). They consisted of four steps: speculation, designing the project activities, conducting the project activities, and evaluation. All steps were considered primary and important for both students and teacher in implementing PBI in ESP classroom. Step 1, 2, and 3 provided both teacher and students with hard works and

challenges to make the PBI happen, while the final step referred much more to the teacher to do the finishing.

Step 1 required much energy for the teacher to apply inquiry in the classroom in order to create an understanding towards the principles of ESP. This was not an easy job for she had to prepare good questions to raise to guide the students to their understandings.

Step 2 was also a hard task to do for both teacher and students since they thought setting a plan was not an easy task. However, teacher and students worked together to set up plans carefully so that they could carry out every single activity well.

Step 3 was the hardest for the students. They had to work together with their friends in the group and could manage group problems that might appear. Finally, they had to present their projects (both performance and tests) in the stage of evaluation in which teacher would score their work.

The discussion upon the study presented two important points. The first was positive result of PBI implementation in encouraging students as well as increasing their score representing their knowledge competence of ESP principles. The second was students' responses on the implementation of PBI in ESP class.

The success of PBI implementation in ESP class was characterized by how activities were carried out and controlled. Every group of the class gave their contribution to make it successful despite some problems that appeared in the first cycle. Student-teacher and student-student interactions took place in such a way that the class was guided and directed to their understanding about ESP principles through learning by doing. Cooperative work among the members of the group was spotted by way of group meeting schedule and consultation. In this part, teacher provided the students with some tips and encouraged them to accomplish their projects. Also, the students gained their experience in how they gathered, processed, and categorized information. This was simply a representation of a model classroom activity that differs from the usual teacher-centred classroom practices. In other words, PBI already brought the students to a real-world issues and practices.

Referring to the result of observation and interview, it can be seen there were various responses the students made upon the implementation of PBI in their ESP class. Some students felt that they had to work hard collecting information from various sources and had problems in groupwork management. Once, one group experienced unpleasant attitudes from the respondents and it almost made them give up gathering data. However, some other students found this model of teaching-learning activity quite challenging. They could learn not only from the teacher and textbooks but also from other various sources. They were impressed with how to manage working with their friends and other people outside classroom. Furthermore, they enjoyed having close conversation with the

teacher to get detailed explanation and information. Besides, they considered rubric scoring given by the teacher useful and meaningful so that they could improve their presentation and revise their project.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Referring to the result of the study, it arrives to the conclusion that the implementation of PBI upon ESP classroom of study program of English Language Education Wijaya Kusuma University was successful. Providing students with projects on the purpose of getting them to understanding upon the principles of EFL teaching for English for specific purposes led the classroom activities to more meaningful atmosphere of learning. Students' achievement increase signified both their success in gaining their learning outcomes and teacher's act of encouragement towards them.

This study, however, cannot generalize the findings since it was specifically designed only for ESP classroom of study program of English Language Education Wijaya Kusuma University. There were some factors that might influence the results of the study. One, the students were positively involved in the activity since ESP was a compulsory subject. Meanwhile, they were sitting in the seventh semester and that made them encouraged to pass the subject without fail. Two, there were some students who retook the subjects because they failed it last year and of course they did not want to fail it any more. Three, the score they gained was categorized not high enough despite its fulfilment to the criteria of success. It had things to do with the rubrics the teacher arranged for the assessment. The rubrics might be too detailed and demanding that most of the projects were evaluated in such a way. Finally, the students who were found pessimistic and unable to cooperate with the other members of the group might also contribute to the performance of presentation. As a result, this might affect their tests, too.

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