

IMPROVING THE TEACHING OF “APPROACHES AND METHODS IN TESOL” THROUGH REFLECTIVE PAPERS

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Abstract— *The present study was aimed at understanding how students perceive their microteaching performance as a basis for the improvement of the subject of Approaches and Methods in TESOL in the English Department of Universitas Negeri Semarang. Ninety students took part in this study. They wrote a lesson plan and carried out a seven-minute-microteaching. Peer students gave a brief written feedback after the microteaching. Students then wrote an individual reflective essay reflecting their strengths and weaknesses. Six sample papers were taken and analyzed. It was found that in general students perceived their strength in the use of visual aids and realia. They saw that the use of the teaching media helped them a lot in successfully delivering the lesson. The students were relatively confident with their English despite minor mistakes. The students admitted that their major weakness was on nervousness of speaking in public. The finding of the study has informed that the teaching of Approaches and Methods in TESOL should incorporate public speaking practices.*

Keywords— *Microteaching, TESOL*

I. INTRODUCTION

Reflective teaching has become a buzzword in many English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) teacher education and development programs. One method of reflection at the disposal of EFL teachers is journal writing. Journal writing is seen as an opportunity for teachers to use the process of writing to describe and explore their own teaching practices (Ho and Richards, 1993, p. 8). Bailey (1990) says that a teaching journal can be a place for teachers to experiment, criticize, doubt, express frustration, and raise questions (p. 218). Brock, Yu, and Wong (1992) suggest that journals are an excellent tool for reflection, are simple to conduct, and promote development of reflective teaching (p. 295).

McDonough (1994) found that practicing teachers indicated that keeping a diary was of interest and value, and for researchers, teachers' diaries were a real insider instrument. We can become aware of day-to-day behaviors

and underlying attitudes, alongside outcomes and the decisions that all teachers need to take (pp. 64-65). While Ho and Richards' (1994) study on this topic was inconclusive, they nevertheless cite their experience of using journals in their in-service TESOL teacher education program and suggest that journal writing can provide an opportunity for teachers to write reflectivity about their teaching (Ho and Richards, 1994, p. 20).

Hatton and Smith (1995) however, point out that journal writing can present some problems in teacher education. They caution that journal entries can sometimes be altered to accommodate to the perceived expectations of the reader, rather than to suit the writer's own (p. 43).

In the present study, students of Approaches and Methods in TESOL wrote a journal reflecting their microteaching performance. The reflection is in the form of a reflective essay which is considered to be a form of teacher journal.

II. RESEARCH QUESTION

The study aimed at understanding the students' perception of their strengths and weaknesses in the microteaching as a basis for the improvement of the teaching of Approaches and Methods in TESOL.

III. METHODOLOGY

The participants of the study were third year students of English Department of Universitas Negeri Semarang. They students took "Approaches and Methods in TESOL." Ninety students from three classes took part in the study. As a final task of the subject, students were given a task to write a lesson plan and demonstrate a peer teaching based on the lesson plan. Students were given a choice, either to apply the Total Physical Response or Communicative Approach. Apart from the lesson plan, students were also encouraged to supplement their lesson with teaching media.

The time allotted for the lesson plan was seven minutes. The main purpose of the microteaching was for the students to show their ability to open a lesson, give various instructions, ask questions, give compliments, and close the lesson. The microteaching was conducted in four sessions. Each session was for seven to eight students. In the end of every microteaching session, students gave a peer feedback comprising strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions. As a closing activity at the end of the semester, all students were assigned to write a one-thousand-word long reflective essay. The essay contained backgrounds, strengths, weaknesses, plan of improvement, and conclusion. Six essays (two from each class) were taken as a sample. Five of them were about Total Physical Response and one was about Communicative Approach.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the strength and weaknesses of students as they expressed in their reflective papers. The initials given between brackets are the students' initials.

Student 1 (DMR)

DMR chose Communicative Language Teaching for her microteaching. She applied information gap activity with the grammar focus of simple present tense. Her lesson's vocabulary focus was on preposition.

DMR saw herself to be good at the time management. She was able to carry out the microteaching in the allotted seven minutes. She also perceived that she was good in using the teaching aid (task card). Another strength that DMR also perceived was regarding voice. She perceived herself to speak clearly with proper intonation and volume.

Apart from the strength, DMR admitted her weaknesses. She reported to have been nervous during the microteaching. She forgot what she had planned to say in the beginning and at the end of the lesson. She also considered herself not to give enough feedback to the students. She made several grammar mistakes.

Student 2 (SDS)

Unlike DMR, SDS chose a different method, Total Physical Response. In her lesson, students were to read aloud several words and acted out the words. SDS felt that she was successful in giving demonstration of various actions in the lesson. She also considered herself successful in coping with the nervousness and making the class alive.

Although SDS felt that she was quite confident and calm, nervousness overcame her when she demonstrated singing a short song. She also thought that her students occasionally confused with her instruction. She also admitted to have forgotten some parts of the lesson.

Student 3 (KSP)

KSP's lesson applied Total Physical Response focusing on children's routines in the morning. In performing the microteaching, KSP considered herself to have demonstrated various strengths. She was able to manage

time well. The visual aids and realia she used helped her a lot. She also considered that her students responded to her instruction well as her voice was loud and clear. KSP considered herself to be busy thinking about the sequence of the lesson. She worried a lot of what she had to do after one activity was completed. She also felt that she was too fast in giving commands. She also missed an activity that she had planned, i.e. demonstrating breakfast.

Student 4 (KS)

KH chose the Total Physical Response focusing on giving commands. She considered her plus was on the effective use of teaching aids, such as doll, ball, balloon, and paper plan. Her point of weakness was on her concentration. She was concerned with her performance too much. She planned to give compliments to the students but she failed to do so because of too much nervousness.

Student 5 (JCH)

JCH applied the Total Physical Response in her microteaching. She considered her strengths were on her pronunciation and the use of teaching aids. She spoke clearly with proper pronunciation. Her handout, she claimed, was helpful in running the lesson. However, she found some minuses also in her performance. She wrote that her voice was not very clear making her instructions not very clear either. She also took seriously the feedback she received from her peers that she looked tense in front of the class.

Student 6 (EBN)

EBN's lesson applied the Total Physical Response focusing on parts of the body and activities related to body movements. She saw several pluses in her performance, such as her use of visual aids, pronunciation, students' response, and the use of body language. Her visual aids supported her very positively in delivering the lesson. Her pronunciation was clear and proper. Students enjoyed her lesson. Her gesture and body language in general was positive and appropriate. That is what EBN claimed to be her strengths. EBN also admitted some weaknesses in her microteaching. She was nervous in the beginning of the lesson and her nervousness led to grammatical mistakes.

The students' reflective papers revealed how they perceived their microteaching performance. As the data showed, students mostly viewed the use of teaching media as very helpful in delivering the lesson. The teaching media in the form of visual aids and realia helped them to contextualize the lesson and also to deliver the lesson systematically. Students in general also felt confident with their English although they admitted to make grammatical mistakes.

The most frequently mentioned weakness was nervousness. It was challenging for students to cope with nervousness in front of the class. They had too many things to worry about. They had to deliver the lesson

systematically. At the same time, they had to be aware of their English accuracy and fluency.

V. CONCLUSION

The lack of experience in public speaking seems to contribute to nervousness. This is a very valuable finding of the study. To improve the teaching of Approaches and Methods in TESOL, more practice of speaking in front of the class should be given. Further research of how to effectively incorporate speaking in front of the class and the study of teaching methodology should be conducted.

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