

Intercultural Teaching and Learning English through Reading Skill

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ABSTRACT

In this globalization era, teaching English has to also involve intercultural aspects in order that students can develop their awareness towards the differences of the culture of the target language. The intercultural teaching and learning English can be incorporated with reading skill activities as suggested by Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2008). This study was a qualitative study which portrayed reading activities to assist intercultural teaching and learning English. The data were taken with observation of teaching learning in the classroom with 25 students of 2nd semester at a state university in Karawang, West Java. 6 students were also selected to have interview in order to know their response and understanding. Finally, there were some reading activities, such as critical reading and cultural bump, conducted in the classroom that could quite effectively improve the students' intercultural awareness. Some students also responded by giving positive statements about reading skill activities so their intercultural understanding could improve. However, implementing these activities were not an easy task because the teacher needs to understand the theoretical concept of intercultural language learning

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1. INTRODUCTION

English language teaching now has also incorporated with intercultural communicative competence. The students are not only taught English language itself but also they are taught how to communicate with other people from different backgrounds or culture effectively and appropriately in many ways. In addition, intercultural English teaching is also important for students to make them become an intercultural persons. As we know that in English language teaching itself, there are four skills that have to be mastered by students namely speaking, writing, listening and reading skill. The last one mentioned is an important skill that should be learned by students so that they can be a good and critical students especially in seeing differences among cultures. Therefore, intercultural English learning is very possible to be brought with reading skills. It can improve students' reading skill while they also learn other cultures and make them aware how to use language appropriately.

As suggested by Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2008), intercultural English learning can be incorporated with the four skills of English including reading skill. There are many ways of teaching intercultural English with reading skill to be performed in the classroom. In addition, teaching reading allows students to read various texts such as textbooks, newspaper, magazine, and etcetera. However, Gomez (2012) suggests that EFL learners should not entirely acquire language through textbooks, but also through the use of authentic texts. Authentic text can be an appropriate text to be read by students especially because it contains wider and various informations. Specifically in intercultural English learning, the most important thing is that the teacher is possible choose appropriate which consists of cultural contents. It will be very useful as media in the reading class.

Furthermore, there are some researchers who also conducted similar relevant studies in field of intercultural English learning with reading skills in recent years. The previous studies include a study by Gomez (2012) that focuses on intercultural communicative competence through reading authentic literary text. The other studies were conducted by Nie (2017) concerning intercultural study through novel reading, Sharp (2010)

dealing with intercultural rhetoric and reading comprehension, and Yehezkel & Devora (2017) that carried out a topic about reading comprehension through intercultural competence in multicultural classroom. These studies have given the researcher some influential ideas and knowledge to also conduct a study especially in Indonesia context.

Furthermore, based on the background and previous studies above, this study tries to answer the following research questions:

- A. How are the students' reading activities in intercultural English learning?
- B. How are the students' responses to learning reading activities?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Intercultural language learning

Language and learning are terms that have correlation. In intercultural language learning, language and learning are fundamentally interrelated concepts. Intercultural language learning is not only about how to teach a language, but also it involves newer and richer ways to connect languages to other learning areas. Liddicoat et al. (2003: 46) mention that intercultural language learning involves the fusing of language, culture and learning into a single educative approach. It begins with the idea that language, culture and learning are fundamentally interrelated and places this interrelationship at the center of the learning process (2003:46).

In terms of learning, students engage in developing cultural competence from the beginning of their language learning (Crozet et al, 1999). Liddicoat et al. (2003) also add that intercultural language learning involves developing with learners and understanding of their own language and culture in relation to an additional language and culture. Liddicoat et al. (2003) explain that at a global level the goals of intercultural language learning are as follows.

1. Understanding and valuing all languages and cultures
2. Understanding and valuing one's own language and culture
3. Understanding and valuing one's target language and culture
4. Understanding and valuing how to mediate among languages and cultures
5. Developing intercultural sensitivity as an ongoing goal.

The goal of learning is to 'decenter' learners from their pre-existing assumptions and practices and to develop an intercultural identity through engagement with an additional culture. Jokikokko (2009) adds that, for a teacher, important intercultural competences are, for instance, the ability to take students' various cultures, languages, backgrounds and abilities into account in teaching and learning.

Thus, teachers are responsible to make the learners understand their own culture before exploring the target culture (Valverde: 2005). As a process of developing intercultural understanding, students need to be able to 'decenter' from their own culture (Byram, 1989). In language learning, this decentering takes two forms: decentering from one's own language and culture in communicating with others and decentering in the processes of teaching and learning.

2.2. Intercultural English learning through reading activities

Basically, there are three main stages in conducting intercultural English learning as suggested by Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2008) that are explanation, collection and implementation. It is formulated based on the framework of communicative competence that includes five components namely, discourse, linguistic pragmatic, intercultural competence and strategic. The stages are to help teachers tackle cultural aspects in the language classroom especially through four skills of English. There are some samples of reading activities in intercultural English class as suggested by Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2008). including critical reading, cultural bump activities, activities that focus on written genres or cultural extensive reading.

Critical reading. In this activity, students are given text and they make judgments about how the text is argued. It is a beneficial reflective activity type for promoting learners' intercultural competence while practicing the reading ability. In carrying out this activity, the general framework based on pre-, during-, and post-reading instruction could be of help.

Teachers can also make learners read situations in which there is a *cultural bump* that is, a situation that cause people to become uncomfortable or strange give particular cultural beliefs and attitudes. Then, different written interpretations of the behavior of the people involved in the situation can follow the account in a multiple choice format to allow class discussion and subsequently, check whether learners have correctly interpreted what went wrong and why people acted as they did, which will definitely help learners become aware and understand behavior in a target culture (Williams 2001).

Learners could also be required to analyze two written texts which have a similar genre as for example, reading advice columns in daily newspapers but which are from different cultures in order to compare if concerns and debates vary between cultures (Williams 2001). The sentences of a cultural anecdote could be scrambled by the teacher and then learners could be requested to put the anecdote in sequence. This activity type is a useful one in order to help learners discern organizational issues in a given text (Celce-Murcia and Olshtain, 2000).

All material gathered by the learners in the second stage of the project could serve as the basis to prepare additional activities that make learners develop in activating all competencies of the communicative competence construct. Word association activities where learners associate words in a given text to a given cultural topic could be helpful to promote learners' linguistic competence. Analysis of the text devices that convey the intended meaning of a given cultural text could serve to promote learners' pragmatic competence. Furthermore, the practice of previewing or making guesses about the content of a given cultural text both before and while reading could work to develop learners' strategic competence.

3. METHODS

This is a qualitative study that investigates students' reading activities that is incorporated with intercultural English learning and the students' response to the teaching and learning activities. There are 25 students of second semester at a state university in Karawang taken as participants. Two techniques of collecting data were carried out including observation and interview. Observation was done to portray the teacher and students' activities in teaching and learning intercultural English incorporate with reading skill, while interview was conducted to get more information about students' responses after learning intercultural English with reading skill. Six students were chosen to be representative in interview. The data were analyzed qualitatively through thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). Furthermore, the data taken from various techniques including observations and interviews were gathered to be identified and analyzed thematically and later to be displayed and made a conclusion.

4. RESULTS

This result and discussion are based on the research questions mentioned in the previous chapter, namely: A) How are the students' reading activities in intercultural English learning? and B) How are the students' responses to learning reading activities? Accordingly, there are two main findings taken from the data.

4.1. Students' reading activities in intercultural English learning

The data finding shows that there are various intercultural reading activities performed in the teaching and learning process. The text used as authentic media is entitled "How American parenting is killing the American marriage" that was taken from <https://qz.com/273255/how-american-parenting-is-killing-the-american-marriage/>. This text is an argumentative text, so the students may have different perspective in discussing it. Critical reading activity was done in the classroom. There were three main steps in this activity that are pre-, during-, and post-reading instruction. In the pre-reading activity, students were asked to determine the content of the reading by previewing the passage and then judge whether the identified content can be a representative of their own culture.

At first, they said that basically the American culture is different with Indonesian culture especially in marriage and parenting although there may be similarities too. The students were also asked how they could know the American's marriage and parenting whether on internet, movies, magazine or friends, and they discussed it with the teacher. During reading activity, the students read the whole text and identify the cultural differences of American and Indonesian marriage and parenting. They also discussed the topic with their friend and made a list of findings based on their reading. They compared their findings with other students and discussed it again. The teacher sometimes became facilitator and gave clarifications towards the students' findings. Finally, in post-reading activity, the students were asked why there are some differences between American and Indonesian marriage and parenting, and what they should do towards the differences. The teacher did reflection with the students to summarize their reading. It is the most important part in intercultural learning where the students should be taught to be a responsible person who aware of and respect differences as well as do not judge other cultures as wrong although it is different with theirs.

In the second meeting, the text used was entitled "Developing a social life in the USA" taken from https://www.internationalstudent.com/study_usa/way-of-life/social-life/. It is a text that tells about how students live in American college especially for international students. A *cultural bump* activity was done, that is, a situation that cause people to become uncomfortable or strange give particular cultural beliefs and attitudes. As usual, three main steps were conducted that are pre, during, and post reading. In pre-reading activity, students were asked to identify the content of the reading by previewing the passage and compare

the content between their own culture and the target culture. Students provided different statements towards the topic that was about American social life.

In during-reading activity, students read the whole text and discussed with their friends. They might find some interesting and strange culture that happen in American social life especially in making friends. The teacher then provided some situations that required students' responses in order to know what should they do in the situation where there are as non-native people of American culture. The situations were vary such as responding an invitation to a party, being introduced to a new friend, and inviting someone for dating. The students wrote their responses and also referred to the text they had read before. The students discussed their answers with the teacher and the teacher checked whether students have correctly interpreted what went wrong and why people acted as they did. It helped students to become aware and understand behavior in a target culture.

4.2. Students' responses to learning reading activities

Students' responses were taken from interviews with 6 representatives. Basically, students provided positive comments to the intercultural reading learning process. It gave them new experience and challenges in learning English. To know the students' responses from interview, the followings are sample of students' answer.

Do you like learning English with its culture?

S1 : I like it so much because it is interesting to know other culture.

S2 : It is a new thing of learning English for me because I was also taught the culture of English (target culture) and I like it.

Do you like the reading activities in intercultural English?

S3 : This reading activities were fun and interesting especially in *cultural bump* activity.

S4 : I like it, especially the text provided by the teacher is interesting. It is about social life in America.

Do you feel that your reading skill is improved?

S5 : Actually, I do not really think that my reading skill is improved a lot, maybe because I only focused on the cultural issue on the text. But I believe it will give me more ability.

S6 : Yes, I feel I can read the content quite well and I understand the content so I can discuss with other friends and the teacher too.

How do you see cultural differences in the reading? Do you think it is wrong or not?

S1 : I do not think it is wrong, because they have their own way to do something. It is their culture, and we should respect to them.

S2: : There is nothing to judge as wrong because we have different habit, so I think they are different because it is their habit.

Based on students' response above, there are four important points to discuss. The first, they like to learn English with its culture because it is interesting and they found it as new thing. The second, Reading activities performed in the teaching and learning Intercultural English were fun and interesting too. Students are interested to the texts given by teacher and *cultural bump* activity. The third, Students still think that their reading skills are not significantly improved because they just performed the activities in two meetings. The fourth is the students show that they become more aware and respect to differences of other cultures. The most important thing is they do not judge other cultures wrong although some habit and values are different with their own culture.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the research questions, there are two conclusions that can be taken in this study. The first, Students' reading activities in intercultural English learning were vary including critical reading and cultural bump. These activities provided more opportunities for students to be critical students in viewing differences of other culture. The texts used also supported the learning activities since they were taken in authentic sources. The second, students' responses towards the learning reading activities were positive. They said that they got new ways of learning reading that is interesting and fun especially the cultural bump activity. However, they still think that their reading skills are not significantly improved because they just performed the activities in two meetings. And the most important thing is that they have shown positive attitudes to become persons who are aware of differences and also respect them. Finally it is suggested to other teachers to also use this kind of activities in order to give students different opportunities and challenges in learning English especially reading activities. And it is better for teachers to also understand the theoretical concept of intercultural language learning.

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