

The Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching Principles in Teaching English Business Letter Writing for a Vocational School

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Abstrak: *Pengajaran menulis dalam bahasa Inggris di sekolah menengah kejuruan bertujuan untuk memampukan siswa untuk berkomunikasi dengan bahasa Inggris dalam bentuk tulisan. Oleh sebab itu pendekatan yang dipakai adalah pendekatan yang komunikatif. Meskipun pendekatan ini sudah diterapkan oleh para guru namun belum mencapai hasil yang maksimal. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mencari tau sejauh mana prinsip-prinsip dari pendekatan tersebut telah diterapkan oleh para guru terutama dalam mengajar penulisan surat-surat bisnis dalam bahasa Inggris di SMK N II Bukittinggi. Tiga orang guru bahasa Inggris yang mengajar di kelas tiga, di pilih sebagai subjek penelitian melalui teknik purposive sampling. Data dari penelitian ini diambil melalui pengamatan kelas dan wawancara. Dari hasil pengamatan dan wawancara inilah diketahui bahwa keseluruhan dari prinsip pendekatan yang komunikatif belum diterapkan secara maksimal misalnya tidak diikutsertakannya siswa dalam proses penkoresian, tidak di dorongnya siswa untuk menulis diluar kelas serta adanya guru yang tidak setuju dengan kegiatan kerja kelompok dalam kegiatan menulis di kelas. Oleh sebab itu, disarankan pada para guru untuk lebih mendalami semua prinsip-prinsip dari pendekatan komunikatif ini sehingga bisa diterapkan dengan lebih baik untuk mencapai hasil yang lebih baik pula.*

Key words : *Implementation, CLT, Bussiness letter writing*

A. Introduction

Communication takes place in two forms namely spoken and written form. The spoken form is considered to be the easiest, simplest and the most effective way to communicate in any language. The written form, on the other hand, is not as simple and as easy as the spoken one, but it is also efficient to be applied in communication. Though written form of the language is quite complicated, in certain field, communication can only be done in this form, for instance, memo, formal proposal, letters and others. Through writing, people can express their ideas in a systematic way and file it

up so that they can rehearse it anytime they need it. Considering the importance of this writing skill, among other skills like speaking, reading and listening, in English classroom developing student's writing skill is a priority.

Unlike the speaking, writing is not a natural talent (White in Khoo, 1981). Writing skill cannot be acquired by the students naturally and unconsciously. There are some procedures and rules that have to be taught to them. It is, ofcourse, not easy to teach those procedures and rules. Many scientists believe that writing skill is difficult to be taught especially in foreign language

classroom. Teaching this skill is actually intended to help students to develop their competences in writing or to train them in applying the procedures and rules such as grammar and vocabulary as a mean to link sentences and organise their ideas. Due to the importance of this skill and the difficulties in teaching it, an appropriate teaching technique or approach is needed to be selected and applied in a good way. The approach should touch all the elements of the teaching and learning process such as the classroom activities, the material and everything.

Related to the teaching aspects, the government has tried to develop a curriculum which can be taken by the English teachers as the guidance. The Ministry of Indonesian Education no 232/U/2000 defines curriculum as a set of plan, management, content material, instruction and evaluation which is used as a guidance in holding the teaching and learning process in the classroom. In other words, it is a set of program which is arranged and carried out in such way to reach certain educational goals. The curriculum has been developed and changed from time to time. The latest curriculum is called school based curriculum. This curriculum is actually the improvement of the previous curriculum which is called competence based curriculum. Technically the two curricula are not really different one each other. The difference is that the competence based curriculum is arranged by the Indonesian educational departement in Jakarta and should be applied in all schools in Indonesia, while the school based curriculum is arranged by the certain educational unit or by

the school itself and only be applied in those educational units or by the school itself. The school based curriculum is considered to be more contextual because it is directly connected to the level of the educational units and also adapted to the culture and the local need where the teaching and learning process takes place. However, both curricula have the same principles that the teaching of English is aimed to enable students to communicate in spoken and written English.

In the vocational schools the curriculum is specially designed to enable students to use the practical English in their real life based on their own field. Hence, the teaching approach applied in the classroom should be communicative.

One of the English teaching approach which is highly valued is called communicative language teaching (CLT). The purpose of this approach is to develop students' communicative competence both in spoken and written form which later can be seen from their performance.

The same as in some other countries, in Indonesia, the communicative language teaching approach has also been applied in English classroom especially at the vocational high school where students are prepared with certain ready-used skills and the ability to communicate in English in both spoken and written forms at least in their own fields. To support and guide the teachers with its knowledge and the way on how to apply that in the classroom, some seminar, trainings and workshops have been held dealing with the approach. Unfortunately, some teachers still have a misconception on the application of this approach.

Some of them say that communicative language teaching approach is only applicable in teaching speaking skill. In fact, it is also applicable in teaching writing skill as well as the other two skills. As Savignon (2003) proposes that communicative language teaching is not exclusively concerned with the the teaching of English for oral communication only, but the principles can also be applied equally to the teaching of English reading and writing. From her explanation, it is clear that any teacher of English should treat the teaching of writing with the same intention as in teaching speaking skill, so that the goal of the English teaching as a whole can be achieved.

Based on the researcher's preliminary study that she conducted at 22nd September 2010, the type of English writing which are offered at the third grade syllabus of vocational high school, SMKN II Bukittinggi, is the functional writing. More specifically, it is the English letter writing. Since any functional writing is communicative, the approach used in teaching it is the communicative approach. However, the teachers said that they only applied some of the principles of the communicative language teaching approach. As a result, English writing class is considered to be the most boring activity by the students which obviously influenced their mark. Even though most of the English teachers there have attended some training, seminars and workshops on how the communicative language teaching approach should be applied. In other words, the approach has not been fully applied yet. Hence, the writer investigated the implementation of

the communicative language teaching approach in teaching English letter writing at a vocational high school.

B. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative language teaching (CLT) has been widely known in the field of language teaching for many years. It is a teaching approach which was invented by the linguist due to the dissatisfying result of applying some older language teaching methods such as grammar translation method, audiolingual method and others. Those older methods which were applied in the field of foreign language teaching as English were considered ineffective for learners to reach the goal of language learning, that is to enable learners to communicate in the target language. It is expected to make language teachers to see that their students can use the language they learn to communicate without concerning on how the language should be classified. Thus, CLT is an approach which is expected to be able to help students use and experience the language in order to get a better result in the language teaching and learning.

CLT has not been precisely defined by any linguist of language researcher. It is considered as an approach, instead of a method. Rodgers (2001) says a method is fixed system with the range of procedures which are included in a particular teaching technique. It is a set of procedures or activities which is chosen and applied by the teachers which is expected to reach the teaching goal through certain techniques. An approach, on the

other hand, represents language teaching philosophies that can be interpreted and applied in variety of different ways in the classroom. Thus, there is no specific techniques in applying the approach in the classroom. In addition, most scientists such as Nunan (1989), Littlewood (1988), Zainil (2005) agree that the communicative language teaching is one of the innovative approaches to enable the students to communicate in the target language. Based on the approach the language learner should be able to use the language as a means of communications in both spoken and written form. Savignon in Murcia (2001) says communicative language teaching is an approach used in the language classroom which allows students to experience and use the target language by encouraging them to interpret, express, and negotiate the meaning in communication. The teaching process she adds, should be more emphasized to the language use, not to the language form. Thus, communicative language teaching approach views the language as a communication device or as a main mean to communicate information and messages between people.

C. Types of Writing

Basically, there are two main types of writing namely; academic writing and functional writing (Houge, 2003). Academic writing is defined in certain ways. Firstly, its any piece of writing up with purpose of fulfilling a certain assigned writing task as a task or requirement from school, teachers or professors. Secondly, it can also be defined as a process of writing or breaking down the ideas with the purpose of presenting information within a clear way and understandable for the reader

to read (Harmer in servito, 2008). It is also defined as the process of presenting ideas, in a rational, organized, systematic, reasonable and logical ways. In other words, academic writing is the process of presenting ideas and information which is intended to make the reader understands about certain things by following certain rules and features.

(Reinking and Hart, 1986) propose some characteristic of the academic writing such as, it is semi formal, impersonal and objective. Next, it uses the third person point of view. After that, it precises and dwells with truth, facts and theories. Finally, it contents arguments and supported by the evidences. Academic writing includes thesis, essays, and reseach reports. They can be written in form of descriptive, expository, narrative, argumentative and persuasive.

The second main type of writing is called functional writing. Functional writing is the type of writing which communicates and interpretes specialized information in a way that makes it useful for a reader (Boe, 2001). In functional writing, the writer can do a direct communication with the intended reader, the same thing as what people can do in a direct oral communication.

Different from academic writing, functional writing can be personal, and can involve the subjectivity of the writer. It is also intended to specific readers and any feedback or responses is expected from the reader after they read the writing. Functional writing includes posters, advertisements, brochures, rules, notes, recepies, and letters. All types of letters such as personal

letters and bussiness letters are belong to functional writing.

D. Business Letter Writing

Based on the Oxford dictionaly letter is defined as a piece of handwritten or printed text adressed to a recipient and typically sent by mail. It is also defined as written message containing information from one party to another (Wikipedia, 2005). Thus, letter is an instrument of communication between a writer and a specific reader with many different purposes.

Baugh (1994) devides into two types, namely; informal and formal letters or she also called them as personal and social letters. Informal letters are ussually written by the acquaintances, friends or family. It is a personal letter that is written for personal purposes, such as expressing sympathy, congratulating or simply to have a personal contact or sharing informations about somethings. Formal letter on the other hand is a letter which is written to the people who the writer doesnot know in personal level. The purpose of writing the formal letters are varries such as, to ask for information about a product or company, to apply for a job, to complain about certain unsatisfying product or services, and others. One of the examples of formal letter is a bussiness letter.

Bussiness letter is the letter which is written for bussiness purposes. Crowther (2007) states the purpose of the bussiness letter will lead to some kind of action from both the sender and the recipient of the letter. Thus, writing bussiness letters require good communication

skills and knowledge of the bussiness letter conventions. Different from the personal letter, in bussiness letter the language should be formal, direct and clear.

The same as other functional writing, bussiness letter writing is also communicative as stated by Gartside (1986), writing a letter is just like holding a conversation by post. He added that in bussiness letter, the letter itself represent the person who write it. In other words, in order to create a good impression of the writer, the letter should be written in an effective way.

In order to write an effective bussiness letter, Reinking and Hart (1986) propose some points that the writer should consider. First, the writer should consider about the receipient of the letter. The adreesee of the letter influences the language which is used in the letter, the tone and style of writing it. The next consideration is the reason or the purpose of writing the letter. It can be, to ask some information to a company, to apply for a job, to order some product and others. After that, the writer should also consider about what information that the writer need to put in the letter to be conveyed to the recipient. This point depends of the purpose of writing the letter. Finally, what is the writer expect from the recipient, whether the writer expects the recipient to give some information, to consider about the write's application, and others.

Beside the above consideration, there are some other bussiness letter writing conventions that writer should follow in order to write good bussiness letters. The conventions are based on the type the

bussiness letter. Some of the general conventions of the bussiness letter that should be included in writing any bussiness letters are salutation, introduction, the body of the letter, the closing, the complimentary closing and signature of the writer (Baugh 1994). In short, writing an English letter writing is not an easy task to do as there are many things that should be considered and many conventions that should be learned in order to make an effective bussiness letter writing.

E. CLT in Teaching English Writing

Having reviewed some general principle of CLT previously, Hong (2008) outlined four of the principles which are mainly concerned with the skill of writing. The principles are understanding the culture difference, adjusting the roles of teacher, student and the material, incorporating the process of learning with the product of writing, and combining the all four basic skills.

a. The teacher should understand the cultural differences between the first language and the target language.

Raharjo (2010) states that language is a socio-cultural phenomenon, hence learning certain language is actually learning how to conduct a communication from which we can get an understanding of how language is used in a society and culture which supports it. Thus, the difference culture where the two language is used influence the way the people communicate in both the spoken and the written form. In spoken form, the difference can be identified from the speesch norms,

the attitude while speaking, the speech position and others. While in written form, the difference can be identified from the arrangement of the word, the collocatin and the diction, the writing style and others.

b. The roles of teachers, students and the material should be adjusted in order to fit the process of writing.

1) The role of teacher.

Unlike in traditional teaching method, where teacher is considered as the transmitter of the language knowledge and skill, in communicative language approach the teacher is considered as the facilitator in the learning process. Teacher should not be the center of attention in the classroom who does the one way communication, but as the person who is incharge in providing the students with bunch of opportunities for the students to experience the language. She/he should not be the controller who controll the student' writing, students' behaviour, and the outcomes of the learning process, but she/he has to be the guider for the students to make them realize their own mistake and to guide them to the better result of the learning process. Teacher must rensponsible to facilitate the students with the opportunity to experiment the language by priving them with the plenty of chance and time to write or speak in the language.

2). The role of students

Not only the role of teacher, the role of student is also changed based on the communicative language teaching principles. In this approach, the students are no longer

considered as the passive receiver of knowledge, but the center of the language learning. They have more responsibilities to the success of the language learning. Nunan (1989) states that students' role is as negotiant of meaning. He believes that to reach the goal of communicative language teaching approach, the students should be actively participated in the language classroom. In writing classroom for example, the students should be given more time to practice writing rather than spending along time to listen to teacher's presentation about the writing. Ansyar (2004) proposes that the language competence can only be reached through lots of language experience. So, no matter how the students comprehend the theories of a language, without experiencing it they will never achieve the competence of the language which is the main purpose of learning the language.

3). The role of materials and the teaching media

Beside the role of the teacher and the students, the role of material also give a great contribution to the result of the learning process. The material should be those that can help develop student's writing and thinking skill. The material should be authentic. Marroko (2010) states that authentic material is any material which can be brought into the classroom but it is not specially invented for the instructional purpose. Lally (2002) adds that the authentic material should be simple, short, meaningful, and up to date. In addition, Richard (2005) said that a teaching material should relate to the student's need and support a more creative teaching. Thus, instead of

taking an uninteresting text book which consist of some structured examples of certain functional writing form, the authentic examples such as real invitation letter, aplication letter and others will be more effective to improve student's competence in writing.

c. Teachers should incorporate the process of writing with the product of writing

This priciple means that the teacher should not only focus on the result of the writing activity, but also to the process of writing. The teacher should be able to select the activities which can make the writing process become more interesting, enjoyable, interactive, and more importantly communicative. The activities which support this principle are collaborative writing. Harmer (2004:73) urges that collaborative writing allows the students to learn from each other. It is also motivating for the students to work with his/her friends compare to work by themself. The collaborative writing itself can be done in group or in pair.

Furthermore, there are some points that the teacher should concern with in the process of writing. The first point is to choose meaningful topic and let the students choose their own topic and the meaningful activities. Meaningful topic which deals with the authentic material should go along with the meaningful task. Writing is a solitary not social activity but it is done with the purpose for specific audience (Raimes, 1983). Murcia (1991) also states that in English classroom teacher should present activities which are meaningful to the students and which will motivate them to

become committed to sustaining that communication is intended to accomplish a specific goal.

d. The teacher should integrate the all four basic skills of english

In any techniques that the teacher applies in the communicative classroom, teacher should remember that they should integrate all the four skills even only focusing on one skill. The integration of all the four basic skills, reading, writing, speaking and listening, is one basic of communicative language teaching because the real communication involve the four skills. The skills cannot be separated one to each other. In teaching writing particularly, reading, listening and speaking is absolutely important to improve the student writing ability. Reading helps the student to understand how the English writer naturally construct their ideas. Reading materials can be taken by the student as a model to arrange their own idea on a piece of paper. Listening can also helps the student to write, for instance at the begining of writing class the teacher apply the dictation techniques in order to familiarize the students with the topic that will be given. Listening materials can also be a source for the student to develop their idea in writing. Writing a memo based on telephone call can be an interesting activity for the student to conduct. As reading and listening, speaking is absolutely needed in writing class. Students can discuss the topic to be written through speaking.

F. Business Letters Writing

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G. Methods

The research concerned with the evaluation of how the communicative language teaching principles applied in English writing classroom in a vocational high school in Bukittinggi. Thus, the research is classified into a qualitative evaluation research. The research was carried out at a vacational high school in Bukittinggi namely SMK N II Bukittinggi. This school was chosen because the English curriculum in this school demands the teachers of English to apply the communicative language teaching approach. The participants of the reasearch were the three teachers who teach at the XII grade of SMK N II Bukittinggi. The three of them were the main source of the data or the target of the analysis. In this research, the researcher used purposive sampling. The key instrument in this study was the researcher herself. Patton (1990) states that in qualitative inquiry the researcher hold a role as the

instrument of the research. She is the one who was rensponsible in collecting, interpreting, analyzing and concluding the data. In addition, the researcher also used some other instruments to collect the data namely; tape recorder, video camera, observation checklist and interview guide.

H. Findings and Discussion

After analysing the data, the researcher found that the English teachers of SMKN II Bukittinggi, have not applied all the principles of communicative language teaching proposed in the study yet. Eventhough all of the participants in the research have already attended some seminars and workshop about applying the communicative language teaching approach in English classroom, but some of them still faced problemsimplementing some indicators of the CLT principles in teaching process. Below, four indicators are discussed further.

The first indicator, that is teachers should comprehend the cultural differences between the students first language and the target language, have already been understood and applied by all the participants of the reaseach. All the three teachers have already designed all the purpose of the materials which relate to the cultural differences. In other words, all three participants of the research aknowledged the students with the cultural differences of writing in the students' first language and in English. However, they did it by various ways. For instance, one of them asked the students to compare the way the letters are written in Indonesian language and how they are written in English by taking the

samples of the the letter in both languages. The other teachers just told the students about the differences of the first language and target language cultures.

In line with the first indicator, the fourth indicator regarding the integration of the four basic skill in English teaching is well implemented. The teachers have included speaking, listening, and reading in the process of writing although the focus of the lesson is writing. However, the three teachers have already applied it in different ways. They believed that the four skills listening, speaking, reading and writing skill cannot be separated on each other. They integrated all the skill but focused more on the skill becoming the main focus on that meeting.

The third indicator (i.e. teachers should incorporate the process of writing with the product of writing), on the other hand, have not been fully applied by all the participants yet. For example, the three teachers did not encourage the students to write outside the classroom. They found it difficult to find some activities to allow their students to practice their writing. Another interesting finding is what happened with teacher A and the teacher C. Both of them agree that they should not have spent too much time explaining about certain form of writing but provided as much chance as possible for the students to do the writing activity. Their understanding of the principle could be seen along the classroom observation. Teacher B, on the other hand, still spent too much time in explaining and provide a very little chance for the students to write the letter itself. From the observation, it could also be seen that

the students were not enjoying the class. Furthermore, eventhough they have already understood about the idea of the principle, and they agreed that, for example, the language features in writing should be taught as one unit, but in the field one of the teacher (teacher B) tends to separate it, especially when she teaches about the grammar. Instead of teaching the grammar features by internalizing it with the content of letter, teacher B gave a lot of grammar drill. Teacher A and teacher B have understood and applied the two sub-indicators related to the principle.

In addition to the third indicator, the three teachers focused on the product of the students' writing only. The teacher A encouraged the students to have a collaborative learning. The same thing goes to the teacher B, even though she said that the time is the main obstacle in designing collaborative learning activity, but she still found a chance to apply it sometimes. Meanwhile, the teacher C did not encourage the students to have a collaborative learning, because in her opinion, writing is a solitary activity which can only be done privately. This phenomenon shows that the teacher C has a misconception about the value of collaborative learning in the teaching and learning process.

The last indicator is that the roles of the teacher, the students, and the material. Here, the teacher A and the teacher C have applied the the three sub-indicators. They acted as the facilitator, and let the students be the center of the learning process who dominate the class and they used authentic material. They collected the material from the real letters, from internet and others.

Moreover, they also used the learning materials which met the students' needs. All the functional letter which are taught to the students will be very useful for them once the graduate from the school, especially for their careers. However, teacher B on the other hand seemed like applying the conventional way of teaching where she still becoming the center of the teaching and learning process. The teacher B, dominated the class by spending too much time to explain, even the students did not pay attention.

Regarding the roles of students in correcting their mistakes in writing process, none of the teachers which were taken as the participants of the research aknowledge the students that making mistakes in the process of learning is allowed. This phenomenon cause the students choose to take no action than making mistake. They would rather keep silence, even though they do not understand with the teacher's explanation, than making grammar mistake in asking question to the teacher. Not only that, from the finding, it is also known that none of the teachers involve the students in correcting or evaluating their writing. Beside the limitation of time constraint, the three participants did not apply the the principle due to the ability of the students which is considered very low. The teacher A and the teacher C did their role as the evaluator of the students work. They evaluated the students along the process of writing, and they also evaluate the product of students' writing. The teacher B on the other hand did not act as the evaluator of the students' work, as she only scored the students' writing based on the standard that she made. Unlike

the teacher A and the teacher C who wrote some notes on the students writing, and gave some explanation about the mistakes that the students mostly made, the teacher B simply scored and did not do any action related to the students' mistakes.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that the teachers of English who teach the XII grade students of SMKN II Bukittinggi have not fully and significantly applied the indicators of the CLT principle yet. They have applied first and fourth indicators of the CLT in varying ways. However, the second and third indicators were not applied due to some problem which were raised from the teachers, the students and the time constraint.

I. Conclusion

Based on the result of the findings which have been explained in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that the principles of communicative language teaching approach have not been fully applied by the English teacher yet, especially in teaching English bussiness letter writing. Some of the principles have been applied though, but there are some other which have not been applied yet. This fact was caused by several problems.

The first problem has caused the imperfect implementation of CLT principles is the fact that the students ability in English is considered low which caused some of the principles inappropriate to be applied. The next problem is that the amount of time for the English subject is too short. Then, another problem is the teacher's misconception about certain principle of CLT which make them

not to apply it in teaching writing skill. Finally, the last problem come from the students themselves. Their lack of interest of English itself makes the teachers reluctant to apply some of the principle because they think that it is going to be vainful to ask the students to do something that they are not into. In short, the problems come from two sides, from the students' side and some other problems come from the teacher's side.

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