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## UNTOLD STORY: CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON STUDENT-TEACHERS' TEACHING

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### Abstract

*This article proposes strategies to handle classroom management problems commonly faced by English student-teachers. These propositions are inspired by a partial result of an action research involving 12 student-teachers undertaking a teaching practicum subject at five junior high schools in a municipally of West Sumatera, Indonesia. Based on the results of observations and interviews it was found that classroom management problems brought about several constraints for the student-teachers in reaching their teaching objectives. They frequently stopped their activities for a while for the disturbances made by the students and thus they often could not realize their plans well. Sometimes they were not able to organize the students and their activities which in turn caused problems. Thus, it can be concluded that problems are most likely due to the students' low motivation and very limited English ability and the student-teachers' lack of classroom management skills. The problems decreased after applying some strategies which were derived from discussions with the supervisors (i.e. the researchers). In fact, the student-teachers were able to focus more on what and how to teach rather than how to handle their students' behavior problems. In effect, they could teach effectively. The strategies are setting classroom-agreed rules, personal approaches, and application of variety of techniques. Before explaining these strategies, an account of the student-teachers' classroom management problems and how they handled them will be given briefly.*

**Keywords:** classroom management, classroom rules, personal approaches, teaching techniques

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The complexity of teaching English as a foreign language at high schools in Indonesia is brought about by several intertwined factors which include those dealing with individual students' personal problems and teachers and system. To mention a few, students' low motivation, teachers' skills and view about learning English, limited exposure to English use, time allocation, and national examination become the constraints to reach the goals stated in the curriculum. For these reasons, universities producing teachers and government do their best to facilitate teachers and prospective teachers with English knowledge and skills and skills how to teach, so that they become professional teachers.

However, it is recognized that the result of English learning at high schools is often considered unsatisfactory. Many graduates of high schools who are supposed to be able to use simple English fail to do so. This is also confirmed by the low English achievement reflected in the students' National Examination average scores and the students' entry English level when they enter universities.

It is believed that to improve this condition, prospective teachers and teachers knowledge and skills about 'what' to teach and 'how' to teach are to be improved and strengthened through pre-service and in-service trainings. For the latter, as mentioned above, prospective teachers are provided with knowledge and skills through subjects such as TEFL or Methods of Teaching, or Teaching Strategies. In in-service trainings, teachers' knowledge and skills are refreshed through topics revolving around strategies or tips how to teach. In spite of the efforts, problems about English teaching and learning persist. Complaints about the outcomes are not only expressed by government and society or parents, but also by teachers themselves.

Unfortunately, researches to unveil the causes of the problems faced by teachers and prospective teachers are limited. The current study whose partial result presented here was actually not aimed at investigating the problems or the cause of the problems, but to see the effect of reflective teaching on student-teachers' teaching skill. Providentially, the study also disclosed an interesting finding- a big problem that all student-teachers experienced (i.e. classroom management problems). A good value of reflective teaching is that the student-teachers put some thought to find out the causes of the classroom management problems and strategies to overcome them. Here, both the problems and the strategies will be explained.

## 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Teaching English as a foreign language is known to be challenging and interesting, but at the same time it is often frustrating. Many students usually have prior-perception that learning English is difficult because the language contains rules that are different from their first language (i.e. Indonesian). In addition, they have low motivation because they do not see an immediate need of having English skill in their daily life. On one hand, this condition challenges teachers to find ways and strategies to make their students motivated and able to understand and use the language well. Teachers exercise their teaching skills; using their knowledge about language teaching and learning how to adjust to things such as students and school system. On the other hand, when teachers face too many difficulties or constraints, they may not enjoy teaching, or even frustrated.

Savignon (2001, p.15) points out several challenges of teaching English as a foreign language which include, among others, how form and function should be integrated and what appropriate norms for learners are. For the latter, teachers should consider several things such as students' age, interest, motivation, and background. Experienced or new teachers, however, often find it difficult to design their teaching to suit such diversity in the field. One of the difficulties is managing their classes. This is true for the participants of this current study. In relation to this, Nunan (1996) says that inexperienced teachers often focus their attention on classroom management, and this makes them different from the experienced ones.

Classroom management refers to "the ways in which student behavior, movement, and interaction during a lesson are organized and controlled by the teacher to enable teaching to take place most effectively" (Richards, 2001, p. 170). It covers several things. They can include, among others, rules and procedures, managing student work, managing learning groups, and managing problems behavior.

Emmer and Evertson (2009) state that teachers use classroom rules to help communicate expectations for appropriate behaviour. They propose many strategies to realize effective classroom management regarding those aspects. In order to be effective, they suggest that rules be positively worded and clearly stated. The usefulness of the rules for maintaining a conducive classroom environment has to be emphasized. They also note that involving students in rule setting is a way to promote students' ownership of the rules. Students' involvement may take the form of "a discussion of the reasons for having rules, ... a discussion for suggestions for specific behaviours, or decision-making process for specific rules." (pp. 23-24). That way increases students' obedience to follow the rules.

Next, managing group learning technique, if it is not done properly, also sometimes brings about classroom problems. An important issue is forming groups. Three of some points to be considered in forming groups described by Jacobs (2006) are group size, group members, and seating arrangement. The first one is decision about the number of students of a group. He says that smaller groups are better because they easier to coordinate. Larger groups, however, are better for more complex tasks. A size of four members of a group is the most favorable. The second thing to be considered deals with which students will be in a group. There are four alternatives; each has its own strengths and limitations. They include: 1) students decide, 2) teacher decides, 3) groups are formed at random, and 4) groups are formed based on commonality. The last point is how group seating should be arranged Jacobs suggest that students sit closely, so that they can communicate easily. In addition,

the room has to be arranged in a way that teachers can monitor all groups. Richards (2001) states that an effective teacher understands the fact that different kinds of grouping can hamper or promote learning.

To handle the students who have problem behaviours, Emmer and Everston (2009) suggest tips in accordance with different level or intensity of problems that they classify into minor problem, major problem, and escalating or spreading problem. To address these problems, teachers need to judge the effects of the strategy chosen. For minor interventions, they suggest, among others, using non-verbal cues, redirecting behavior, and issuing a brief desist. For moderate interventions, withholding privilege, isolating students, using penalty, assigning detention, and referral to the school office are commonly applied strategies. Regarding more extensive interventions, teachers can design an individual contract with students, hold a conference with a parent, or use a check or a demerit system. Emmer and Everston emphasize that “a general principle that is helpful is in selecting strategy is to use an approach that will be effective in stopping the inappropriate behavior promptly and that has the least negative impact (p. 174).

Using various techniques to cater for learner differences in personality and preferences may also reduce students’ behavior problems. Rationally, when students are taught in a way that suits their personality or preference, they will be interested in following the lesson. In turn, they will stop doing annoying things such as disturbing friends or making noise. In relation to this, Lighbown and Spada (2001) note that a sensitive teacher takes learners’ individual personalities and learning styles into account to create a good learning environment to help learners to be successful. Johnson (2008) also indicates the importance of varying teaching techniques for learner differences. She says that “there are no ‘best’ ways of doing things” (p.212). She emphasizes that “if a method is to succeed, it has to be regarded as ‘convincing’, ‘powerful’, and ‘plausible’. How objective ‘good’ we may feel a method is, it will not succeed if the learners are not convinced by it” (p.211). As learners have individual differences in many aspects, this implies that teaching techniques should vary to suit them. When suitable techniques are used, learners will follow the lesson, which then lessens an unfavorable environment.

To conclude, for challenges faced by teachers and prospective teachers in teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia, they should be able to find and use strategies to realize their teaching objectives. One of the challenges they most likely have is managing their classes. To successfully manage students with individual differences, strategies proposed by some authors above may be applied.

### 3. METHODS

This is a descriptive research. For the purpose and the nature of the study, action research was adopted. The participants were twelve student-teachers undertaking Teaching Practicum subject and eleven cooperating teachers of five junior schools of Padang, Indonesia. The student-teachers implemented regular reflective practice to improve their teaching skill.

Improvement the participants made was measured through three teaching performances over three teaching cycles as reflected in their teaching scores, results of observations, and journals. Interviews with the student-teachers and cooperating teachers were also conducted to find out their perception on reflective practice implemented in the study. As stated previously, this article is concerned only the problems faced by the student-teachers in managing their classes and the way they solved their problems through reflective practice.

The data for the topic of concern of this article were those collected through observations, journal, and interviews. They were analyzed qualitatively and will be presented descriptively. Three successful strategies used by the students were drawn from the results of the data analysis.

#### 4. FINDINGS

The result of data analysis obtained through the three instruments mentioned above shows that all student-teachers experience classroom management problems of varying forms and degrees. The most serious one was students' behavior problems. The problems decreased in the second and the third cycles eventually. The main problems are listed in the table below.

No	Category	Examples
1	students' misbehavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Difficulties to handle behaviours:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• talking with friends while the teacher was talking or their friend was presenting</li> <li>• making noise</li> <li>• doing other things such as drawing things</li> <li>• disturbing others</li> <li>• saying impolite words</li> </ul> </li> <li>- disciplining students</li> <li>- instructing students</li> <li>- going out from the class</li> </ul>
2	Giving turn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- clever students were given more opportunity</li> <li>- giving excessive turns or questions</li> </ul>
3	Wait time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- change the student to answer quickly</li> <li>- answer the questions by herself</li> </ul>
4	Grouping work management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- grouping students</li> <li>- work instruction</li> <li>- monitoring group work</li> </ul>

The problems depicted in the table above are ordered based on their intensity. The biggest classroom management problem deals with handling students who have behavior problems. Based on the observations, it was found that all student-teachers faced this problem. Many students often did or said things that constrained the process of teaching and learning. This made it difficult for the student-teachers to realize their teaching plans. For example, when a student-teacher was giving explanation, some students did not pay attention. They even made noise and disturbed their friends. She had to stop their students from making noise and repeated her explanation. Consequently, she had to skip certain activities or rush for the time available was limited. Furthermore, such situation influenced that student-teacher psychologically. In their journals, in fact, students' misbehavior was the most frequently noted by the student-teachers as the factor that caused difficulties in teaching and made them feel disappointed, fed-up, or even discouraged. In the first interview, the student-teachers admitted that it was difficult for them to manage the class, especially their students' negative attitudes and behaviors. By doing regular reflection the student-teachers' problems reduced as they became more capable of using appropriate strategies to tackle the students who have behavior problems. In the interview at the end of the project, the student-teachers said that they felt that they could handle their students more easily, and thus felt satisfied.

The next problem was giving turns in answering questions and did a task. Based on the observations, most of the student-teachers tended to give the turn to clever students who usually raised their hands or to those who seemed to give their attention to them when they were explaining something. There were some consequences of this practice. Firstly, the other students did not pay attention; they might think that the teacher would not ask them. They did other things and talked each other. Secondly, they felt neglected, the feeling which could cause others problems such as being discouraged and being demotivated. Thirdly, when an appointed student could answer a question correctly, the student-teachers tended to go on to the next question without checking the other students'

understanding. In effect, the objectives of the lesson were not reached. In the first few weeks, before the first interview, no one was aware of this problem and its consequences. In fact, they did not write anything about this in their journals. They just realized it when the researcher raised the problem in the first interview. In the second and the third teaching cycles the student-teachers improved their skill in giving turn.

Another problem related to giving turn was giving inadequate time for the students to answer oral questions. There was a tendency for the student-teachers to change the student to answer a question they posed to another student or to give their own answer. There were two apparent consequences seen in the observations. The students who were appointed to answer the questions seemed to be disappointed because when s/he was trying to think and give her/his answer, the teacher had moved to another student. Next, most of the students did not try to think about the answer it because they seemed to understand that the teacher would finally answer the question by herself if they did not. This means that the teacher's objective to ask the question (whether to activate the students' background knowledge or to check their understanding) was not reached. All of the student-teachers, however, were not aware of this problem. In the first interview, the researcher mentioned their problems dealing with 'wait time'. They admitted their weaknesses and promised to improve them in the future.

Grouping students also happened to be difficult for most of the student-teachers. Apparently, they did not plan how to group their students. The students were grouped just by their seats. There were problems of this way of grouping. For the limited space of each classroom, the students could not work in group comfortably. Because of that, those who were not motivated tended not to participate in the discussion, and even made noise or disturbed those who were working on the task. Furthermore, for grouping on the basis of seats, sometimes the students of a certain group had similar characteristics or abilities. This often caused difficulties in managing the students, which then affected the attainment of the teaching objectives. In their journals, no student-teacher did reflection on group work or problems of grouping students. In the interview, the student-teachers argued that they had difficulty in managing group because the space was limited, so that they could not form the groups effectively. Besides that, some student-teachers said that the time to form groups and changed the seats was very short. Yet, they did not realize that problem of forming groups and grouping students led to other classroom management problems such as difficulty in controlling noise. In the second and in the third cycles, though not significant, the problems reduced

In summary, all participants of this study experienced difficulties in managing their classes. The problems as mentioned above affected their teaching and hampered the ease of the teaching and learning activities they had planned beforehand. Through regular reflection and guidance from the supervisors and the cooperating teachers the student-teachers were able to find strategies to overcome the problems. Improvement was evident after the second and the third cycles. Among the strategies, three of them were apparently effective for handling classroom management problems, especially students' misbehaviours.

### **Classroom-Agreed Rules**

Schools have regulation that their students have to obey. Some general rules usually deal with punctuality, uniform, attendance, etc. According to Emmer and Evertson (2009), in addition to general rules, many teachers have rules to govern a specific behavior or to anticipate what they do not want to happen. A system of rules that is carefully planned makes it easier for a teacher to communicate what s/he expects to the students.

One student-teacher of this study had many students with serious behavior problems in her class. This school was known for its naughty students with very low motivation and low ability. This student-teacher stated that in the first few weeks of her teaching practicum she had mix-feelings-disappointed, fed-up, angry, but challenged. So, she decided to ask the students about how they wanted to study English. She said that she emphasized the importance of studying English in the English class. She said to the students "as far as you follow the lesson and do the activities I ask, I agree to negotiate

how you like the class to be conducted and arranged". To her surprise, some students only wanted one change- their seats. They wanted to choose where and next to whom they sat. This may sound very simple to most of us. It, however, proved to bring a big impact. In fact, based on the observations in the second and in the third cycles and the students obeyed the teacher and annoying behaviours such as disturbing friends and making noise decreased. The other student-teachers who had similar problem were encouraged to do the same thing, setting agreed-classroom rules.

In the second cycle, another student-teacher set a classroom rule dealing with asking permission to go the toilet. She found some students' habit in this case was quite annoying and affected the process of teaching and learning. To illustrate, when a student had not come back to the classroom, another student asked for permission for the same reason. Sometimes, there could be four or five students were outside the classroom. They would come back to the classroom after quite long time. She found out that these students played out side; they found a place where people (i.e. teachers) could not see easily. She discussed with the students the rule. The students agreed that when a student was still outside, another student could not ask for permission. This rule worked well.

The successful of the two student-teachers indicate that setting rules together with the students is one of the ways to have effective classroom management, which automatically enables teachers do their teaching plans well. Thus, the students' involvement in setting a rule makes them responsible to obey it and may make them feel that the rule is theirs.

#### **Use of Variety of Techniques**

The results of observations and interview show that another source of classroom problems were due to limited variety of activities designed by the student-teachers. Many students seemed to be bored, especially when the teachers did an activity in a quite long duration of time. Here is a summary of teaching and learning activities conducted by a student-teacher:

- Asking some questions to activate students' background knowledge
- Explaining telling the definition, the generic structure, and the language features of the text in focus
- Asking the students to read a text
- Asking the students to answer the questions given about the text (the answers were checked together orally)
- Giving another text and asking the students to do the exercise about the text in written form.
- Collecting the students' work

From the example, it can be seen that the activities mainly require the students to read and to answer the questions. The students sat, read, and answered the questions. For the first text, most of the students focused, but for the second one many students were apparently bored and some did other things and disturbed their peers. At this stage, that student-teacher faced difficulties in managing the class. Thus, it was gathered that the monotonous activities seemed to be a cause of the classroom management problem.

In the second and the third cycles the student-teachers were asked to vary their teaching techniques and to ensure that the activities cater for students with different learning styles (audio, visual, kinesthetic). They were also suggested to try to insert a fun activity in every lesson. In addition, they were asked to predict the length of time for activity. It was said that an activity should not exceed 15 minutes.

In the second cycle all student-teachers did vary their teaching techniques. Based on the observations, it was found that many students focused their attention to the lessons better, were engaged in the activities, and seemed to feel happy. Here is an example of main activities by a student-teacher:

- Introducing the topic and asking some questions to activate the students' background knowledge
- Showing 5 pictures (materials for making orange juice) and asking the students one question about each picture.

- Grouping the students (4 students in each group)
- Distributing some statements, each written on a separate piece of paper, and asking each group to arrange the statements.
- Asking a group to volunteer to present their work, and checking the answer together
- Telling the students what they had arranged were statements of a procedure text.
- Asking the students to define a procedure text and its components
- Completing the students' answers

The activities above are obviously varied. The students used different senses. In fact, there was a quite balanced between mental and physical activities. It can be seen that students' different learning styles were taken into account. It could be concluded that varying teaching techniques could help teachers reduced classroom management problems.

### **Personal Approaches**

Some student-teachers had a few very naughty students who usually became instigators in their classes. In their journals those student-teachers sometimes wrote that they were disappointed because they could not handle some naughty students. In an observation, the researcher found out that a student-teacher had a 'chaos' class in which some students did not pay attention; they just wandered around the class, making noise and disturbing friends. Apparently there was a troublemaker that influenced some other students. In the interview the student-teacher said that not only her, the cooperating teacher also found it difficult to handle that particular student.

Tsui (1996) emphasizes the importance of establishing good relationship with students in creating a conducive atmosphere. Some teachers as mentioned by Tsui have employed this strategy and have found it effective. A teacher talked to individual students at recess and lunch time. Following this suggestion, the researcher advised the student-teacher mentioned above to talk to the student individually outside the class, trying to find out the causes of the problem and giving him attention such as giving a responsibility to do something.

Then, that student-teacher tried the suggested strategy. She said that she approached the student and asked he often made troubles. After some chats outside the class at recess time, she found out that the student had family problem and was often scolded by his parents. She gave him some advice. She also gave the student responsibilities such as taking the students' exercise books to the office and distributing materials in the class. Since then, that student had better attitude.

When visiting the other student-teachers, the researcher shared the successful story mentioned above. They were suggested to use the same strategies to handle their students who became the troublemakers in their classes. By the end of the study, in the second interview, three student-teachers reported that the strategies also worked for them. This means that giving individual attention to students is useful.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Classroom management problems faced by prospective teachers of this current study had negative influence on the attainment of their teaching objectives. Regardless their good teaching plans, the students' misbehaviours had made it difficult for the prospective teachers to run the pre-planned classroom activities. The study revealed that the prospective teachers had limited skills how to manage a class. Through regular reflective teaching implemented in the study, the problems decreased eventually. Three major strategies applied to improve the condition are setting classroom rules together with the students, improved group management, and varying teaching techniques. The result of the implementation of the strategies indicates improvement in the process and the outcomes. Thus, teachers and prospective teachers are suggested to apply the strategies in managing their classes. As this study was conducted in a small scope and was not intentionally looked at classroom management issues, further research is needed.

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