

EXPLORING THE 21st CENTURY SKILLS IN STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS PROJECT BASED LEARNING

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Abstract: This study aimed to ascertain the 21st century skills in EFL students' attitude towards project based learning (PBL). More specifically, it elicited some students' attitude in our teaching and learning activities in a course unit of *English Language Teaching (ELT) Project*, Undergraduate Program, English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Bengkulu, Indonesia. The investigated skills were only limited to four dimensions namely critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and entrepreneurship skills. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview, and were analysed qualitatively. This turned out that the EFL students explicitly stated such a course had triggered their critical thinking in particular formulating an educative English event as well as solving the problems coming to them. They also learned how to creatively persuade people to come, thereby imposing their mind on having good manners in marketing. Further details of the students' attitude were discussed.

Keywords: *ELT Project; PBL; The 21st Century Skills; EFL Students' Attitude*

Historically, English has been introduced and taught to Indonesian students as a foreign language since 1945, the time when the World War II ended. In addition to providing the citizen of the country with good education, the Indonesian government in turn developed national curriculum. To date, the national curriculum of Indonesia has been changed eleven times since its first launch in 1945, namely Curriculum 1945, Curriculum 1964, Curriculum 1968, Curriculum 1973 (PPSP), Curriculum 1975, Curriculum 1984, Curriculum 1994, Curriculum 1999, Competence Based Curriculum 2004 (KBK), School Based Curriculum 2006 (KTSP), and the 2013 Curriculum (Widyastono, 2014). Such a change is reasonable since every curriculum is suitable for its era. In the past for instance, when the focus of learning a language is on the language-centered method, the practice of teaching English as a foreign language (henceforth TEFL) was only centered on the teaching grammar and translation (Fachrurrazy, 2011, p.11). Today, the practice of TEFL should equip students not only with the four language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing), but also with the 21st century skills.

Duncan (2009) as quoted by Larson and Miller (2011, p.121) strongly defines that the 21st century skills are the skills dealing with creativity, perseverance, and problem solving combined with performing well as part of a team. Similarly, in her words, Silva (2009) explicates it as an emphasis on what students can do with knowledge rather than what units of knowledge they have (p.630). Of the wide range of the 21st century skills definition, however, in this study, we only limit such skills to four dimensions, namely critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and entrepreneurship. Moreover, the K-13 itself has been imbued with the 21st century skills (i.e. creativity, critical thinking, problem solving) in response to the future competences and global needs as indicated in every single stage of what-the-so-called scientific approach. At this point, the teaching is not on the teacher-centered learning anymore, but is on the student-centered learning as seen in the teaching process.

One of the ways to arrive at the student-centered learning is through a suitable method such as project-based learning (PBL). If we discuss the term PBL in TEFL, we would refer it to the constructivist approach. Such an approach originated from Piaget's notion that learning is not a process of accumulating facts or developing skills, but a process where a child actively constructs understanding of the world based on his/her experiences (Fachrurrazy, 2011, p.53). In order to construct understanding, the teaching and learning should involve students in the inquiry process. The inquiry process, according to K-13, refers to observing, questioning, experimenting,

associating and networking (scientific approach). In our course unit of English Language Teaching Project (ELT Project), we encourage our students to actively and creatively brainstorm ideas, discuss and participate in every single step of the project. This is because language is best learned when the focus is not on language, but when learners' attention is focused on understanding and doing something with language (Kumaravadevelu, 2008, p.92).

The ELT Project is categorized as compulsory course consisting of 2 credits and is taught to the undergraduate sixth semester students at the Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, the University of Bengkulu, Indonesia. As the name indicates, the course is aimed to equip students with the ability to generate ideas not only from individuals, but students also need to discuss it in their group. Besides, they are also equipped with soft skills (i.e. respect, responsibility, trust, honesty) and the 21st century skills (i.e. critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and entrepreneurship).

In light of the concept of PBL, learning-centered methods, student-centered learning, and the needs for teaching the 21st century skills, we then aim to explore the 21st century skills i.e. critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and entrepreneurship in our students' attitude in a semester. Such a situation is due to its unique characteristics that more focused on the students. As a result, the students will feel free to explore themselves in learning English as a foreign language, be it inside or outside the class. Moreover, our students will not only become teachers in the future, but some of them, as we have heard explicitly during a semester, will become officers, entrepreneurs, businessperson, company employees, and so forth.

Method

This study is qualitative in nature. Huda (1999) states that qualitative research is frequently associated with the technique of analyzing data and writing research report (p.37). Unlike quantitative research which seeks facts or causes of social phenomena, the qualitative one concerns with understanding human behavior from the researcher's perspectives (Nunan, 1992, p.4). Based on the notions above, we then report our findings and discussion in descriptive ways, thus this belongs to descriptive qualitative.

The participants of our study were 36 students taking the ELT Project course in the third year of their study. To collect the data, we the lecturers were involved in the process of teaching and learning activities during a semester (16 meetings). Such a case is aimed to have better understanding of the process of inquiry and interaction in the class. At the end of the semester, the students were ready to perform their project. The project was in the form of a creative and educative event in which English was the medium of communication, and was named the Sunday Project.

The instruments were a set of semi-structured interview guidelines exploring the students' response to the project. The guidelines led us to deeply investigate the students' attitude towards the project in fourfold; critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, and entrepreneurship skills. The four dimensions of the 21st century skills were adapted from Redhana's (2015) work.

In the process of data collection, we first delivered a set of questions consisting of 20 items to all the participants. Their responses to the questions were reported verbatim, and were analysed in a fair and reasonable way. When answering the questions, the participants did not need to write their identity, be it in the form of names or numbers. Having collecting the data, we then read their responses on the paper and classified it into two big groups, negative and positive.

Results

Some of the negative instances are such samples as follows:

- (1) *Saya sangat sedikit membuat pertimbangan. Saya malah sering mendengarkan saja.* [I rarely involved in making decision. I always listened to them].
- (2) *Ketua panitianya tidak layak. Masalah utama dilakukan oleh ketua.* [The chief of committee is not worthy. The main problem is on the chief of the committee].
- (3) *Ada banyak masalah terkait lokasi terkait dengan pihak lokasi, sponsor dan miscommunication dengan pihak lokasi acara. Yang lain tidak pernah dilibatkan.* [There were so many problems about choosing a place for the event, sponsorship, and having different perceptions of the way we are dealing with the owner of the place. Others were

never be involved in.

- (4) *Kami mencari peserta dengan cara satu orang panitia harus mendapatkan satu calon peserta. Kami mencari dana dengan door-to-door dan banyak proposal yang tidak berhasil.* [We searched for participants by making strong commitment to ask a prospective participant for every single man. However, we were in vain to ask for fund].
- (5) *Saat mencari dana, perusahaan-perusahaan sulit untuk diajak bekerjasama.* [It was difficult to make money since the corporates were not cooperative].
- (6) *Salah satu sponsor membatalkan bantuan secara sepihak yaitu memberikan spanduk photobooth.* [One of the sponsorship partners canceled their giving].

Examples of positive ones include comments in the following.

- (1) *Dalam mata kuliah ini, kami dituntut untuk berfikir aktif dan kreatif khususnya dalam menentukan tema, jenis lomba dan tempat acara.* [In this course, we were forced to be active and creative particularly in creating theme, types of competition, and the place].
- (2) *Saya menjadi tahu bagaimana membangun kerjasama untuk sebuah acara.* [Now I know how to promote cooperation for an event].
- (3) *Kami dituntut untuk berfikir kritis, harus dapat memutuskan dan mengutarakan pendapat serta memikirkan jenis kegiatan yang akan dibuat.* [We were forced to think critically, decide and give voice to the committee members about the activities we do].
- (4) *Informasi baru yang saya dapatkan adalah masyarakat Bengkulu mempunyai bakat dan potensi dalam hal kesenian.* [There is new information to me that the people of Bengkulu are gifted with arts].
- (5) *Saya bangga menjual makanan, produk kecantikan dan aksesoris kerajinan tangan karena saya kerja keras untuk melakukannya.* [I was proud of selling food, cosmetics, and handicrafts since I worked very hard to do it].
- (6) *Menurut saya, yang kami hasilkan ini sangat berguna karena bisa menghasilkan suatu karya dan bisa menjadi lapangan pekerjaan. Kerjasama dalam kelompok diperlukan dalam dunia kerja.* [In my opinion, what we did was so beneficial since we could create new masterpiece and it could be in the form of a new job. Cooperation in a group is highly in need].

Discussion

In this section, we would present the analysis as to why our students have negative and positive insights into the Sunday Project. In addition to that, we firstly need to recognize that students have an impression on the course they have involved as a result of their interaction in the class. The students also have a bad and good impression of our performance in the class as well. Such experiences have emulsified in their mind thereby resulting in the negative and positive comments on such project. For this reason, we will explicate such analyses in the following.

As we stated earlier that in this study we only aim to explore the existence of the 21st century skills in particular critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and entrepreneurship, in the students' attitude as an indication of the success of teaching and learning process. Probably the analysis as to why the emergence of negative comments is due to bad interaction between the chief of the committee and the committee members. Despite the fact that the chief of the committee seemed unprofessional in handling the project as seen in the second negative comment, we as teachers need to critically see and from whom the comments come (Basthomi, 2007, p.136). Of all the comments about the chief's behavior, only three was found statements about such a case.

In this study, we the lecturers also recognize that the students' ability in dealing with problems is weak. This is apparent in the following comments both in the negatives such as "*ada banyak masalah terkait lokasi terkait dengan pihak lokasi...*" [There were so many problems about choosing a place for the event...], and in the positives such as "*kami dituntut untuk berfikir kritis, harus dapat memutuskan dan mengutarakan pendapat serta memikirkan jenis kegiatan yang akan dibuat...*" [We were forced to think critically, decide and give voice to the committee members about the activities we do...]. Not only did such comments appear in the interview sessions, but it also occurred during the period of teaching and learning activities in a semester. We assume that such a

situation is still logical since their previous experience in dealing with new challenges is not quite enough. As a result, our students always reported the problems to us.

In relation to creativity skills, we see from the comments that they seemed to enjoy the process of the project from the beginning to the end. The comment such as “*saya bangga menjual makanan, produk kecantikan dan aksesoris kerajinan tangan karena saya kerja keras untuk melakukannya...*[I was proud of selling food, cosmetics, and handicrafts since I worked very hard to do it]” is an indication that the students are proud of the things they have done in the project. They also created something that had never been found in the past, be it in the form of traditional crafts or the up-to-date ones. The students’ creativity appeared in the products they had sold which was sold-out. At the time when the project was held, we also had witnessed that our students cooked traditional food and beverage in the venue for the event. This kind of creativity also triggers the students’ entrepreneurship skill in particular selling the goods to the audience.

Further, when we aim to discuss critical thinking, we must be dealing with higher order thinking skills (HOTS). In this case, students are imposed on a situation where they need to think fast and find a curative solution for the problems coming to them. To the best of our knowledge, such a skill is in need of intensive training. HOTS cannot appear unless the students used to dealing with it in their past experience. The comment such as “*kami dituntut untuk berfikir kritis, harus dapat memutuskan dan mengutarakan pendapat serta memikirkan jenis kegiatan yang akan dibuat..*[We were forced to think critically, decide and give voice to the committee members about the activities we do...]” indicates that the students feel burdening, albeit a little bit, in critical thinking. They need much effort to solve a problem in particular deciding the venue of the event and cancelation of sponsorship.

Conclusion

This article has reached its peak, thus some conclusions are drawn. First, the 21st century skills are highly needed for our students in particular university students. It is for the sake of our students’ future. Although they are English Education Department students, in which becoming professional teachers are the goals, they also need to have such skills for their future career.

Second, of the four skills, the critical thinking skill is the most difficult one to have. This is apparent in the students’ attitude during the process of the project. Accordingly, we as teachers need to play our role as facilitators and not dictators in the class. This is important since students need more convenient exposure to the process of scaffolding their confidence.

Last but far from least, the 21st century skills can also be taught to non-English department students since it is universal and teachable in every single subject. It is important in the sense that our students will be dealing with challenges that had never been appeared at the time they were born.

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