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Teaching English to Papuan Students: A Preparation Program for University Level

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Abstract

One of the social responsibilities of a university is realized through an outreach program for people in remote regions. Sanata Dharma University does this by cooperating with the local government of Pegunungan Bintang, a district in Papua province, to hold a program preparing Papuan students to study at the university level in Java. The program is necessary because the quality of education in Papua is different from that of Java, which eventually results in different competence level of the graduates. This study centers around two main issues, namely (1) What are the characteristics of Papuan students which challenge the teachers to facilitate their learning? and (2) How should English be taught to Papuan students? The study reveals that teaching English in this program is very challenging. Papuan students have unique characteristics, which create problems in the process of learning English. Thus, they need different treatment in terms of materials as well as learning activities. In terms of materials, they are to learn English elements and skills. Concerning the language elements to master, similar to other regular English courses, they are taught vocabulary and grammar. However, due to the students' unique characteristics, the strategies employed should require them to recycle the previously learned topics and to apply the knowledge learned through doing some competition games. As of the language skills, the program focuses only on reading and speaking skills. The strategies used in teaching these skills should also accommodate their unique characteristics; that is, by giving discrete reading tasks which are timed so as to make the students focused on the materials. They are also encouraged to make their own questions.

Keywords: Preparation program, Papuan students, characteristics, teaching English.

A. INTRODUCTION

There are many gaps in education that educators face today. Some of them are achievement gaps, funding gaps, and school-readiness gaps. Still, there is another gap that often goes unexamined; i.e., the cultural gap between students and teachers (<http://www.tolerance.org/print/supplement/culture-classroom>). Education in the university level often deals with this kind of challenge since students studying in this level may come from different regions in the country. Sanata Dharma University (henceforth called SDU) opens great opportunities for any future students from different areas in

Indonesia. There are many different cultures found in the university. Besides having regular students' enrollment system, SDU also has another enrollment system based on cooperation programs for the outreach.

One of the outreach areas is Papua. There are some facts related to the education in Papua (<http://edukasi.kompasiana.com/2010/05/14/papua-di-tengah-keterbatasan-sarana-pendidikan-140491.html>). Some inadequate conditions are seen from the limited facilities (school buildings, shoes, uniforms, teachers, and many others). Shortage of local teachers has been overcome by recruiting teachers from outside the region.

However, this is an unsuccessful solution. Therefore, there is a new alternative taken by the local governments. The local governments and NGOs send Papuan to study in various areas outside Papua, mainly to Java. For instance, the local government of Pegunungan Bintang cooperates with a number of universities throughout Indonesia.

With Pegunungan Bintang government, the SDU outreach program has facili-

tated four batches since 2007. The cooperation programs conducted based on certain Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between SDU and provinces or regencies in Indonesia usually calls for a preparation programs, namely a matriculation program to get the students ready for the education in the university level which has different culture. The aim is preparing students to study at undergraduate level in Java.

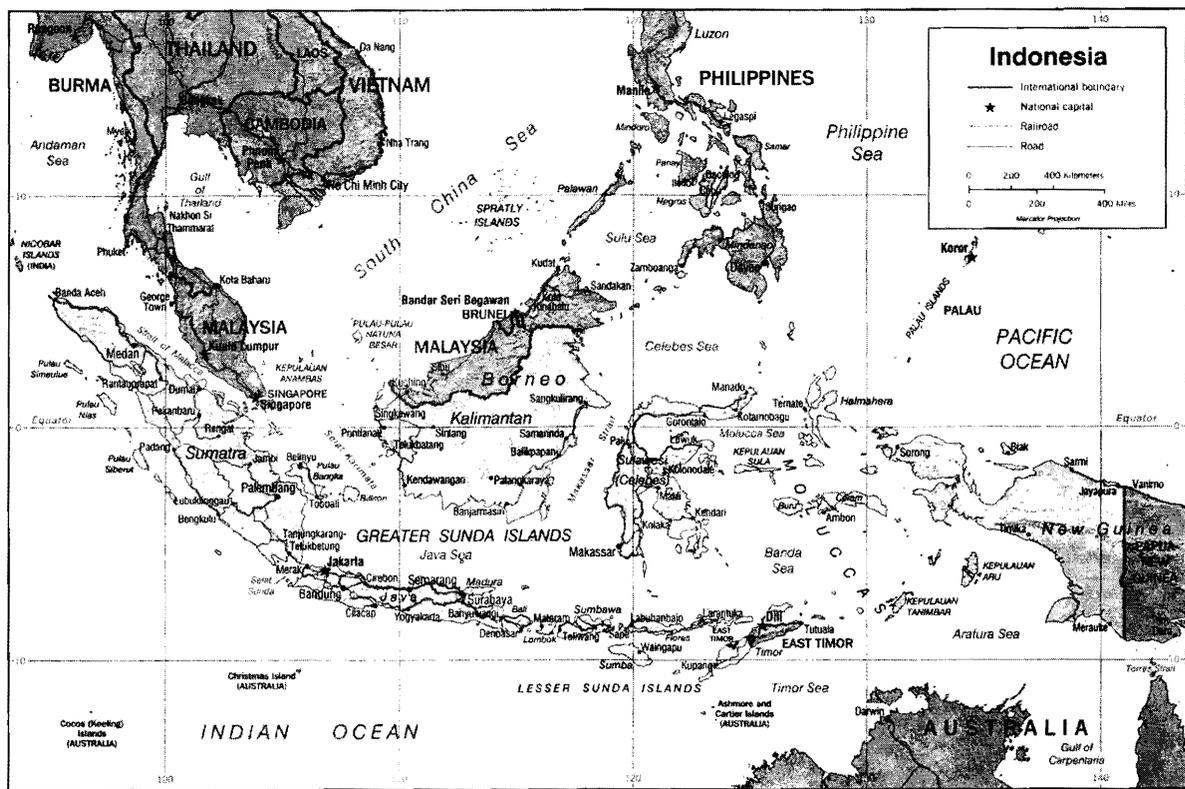


Figure 1: Papua Island's Position in the Map of Indonesia (<http://petacitra.blogspot.com/2012/08/download-peta-indonesia-terbaru-gratis.html>)

Figure 1 portrays the position of Papua island in Indonesia. Papua is one of the biggest islands in Indonesia. It spreads 420.540 km² with the population of more than 3 million people, consisting of 48% non native people. With more or less 255 tribal groups, such as Asmat, Dani, Kamoro, Muyu, Papua has 268 local languages which are not mutually intelligible (<http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papua>). With those varieties of laguages and cultures, it is difficult for Papuans to even understand the speech of those from the same island.

This condition really challenges teachers involved in the program, including English teachers. They have to make sure that the cultural background does not hinder the learning activities. Therefore, this paper addresses two research questions. They are as follows.

- (1) What are the characteristics of Papuan students which challenge the teachers to facilitate their learning?
- (2) How should English be taught to Papuan students?

This paper is limited only to the study of the Papuan students who joined the English matriculation program year 2008/2009 and 2009/2010. Those students are from Pegunungan Bintang district. The district is

situated in the border area between Papua New Guinea and Jayapura. It is one of 29 districts in Papua. The map in Figure 2 shows where Pegunungan Bintang is.

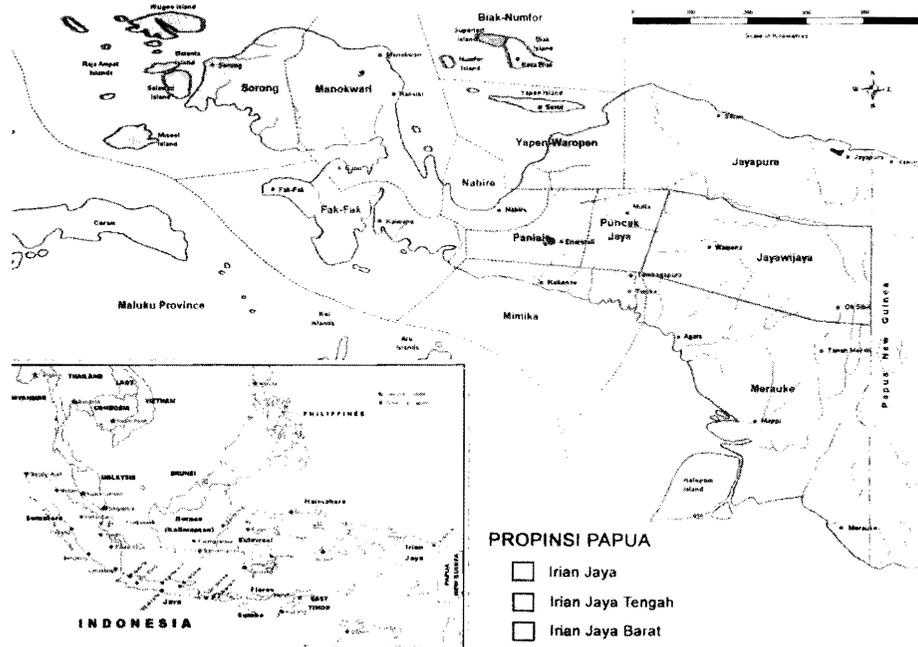


Figure 2: The Location of Pegunungan Bintang in Papua Island (<http://rifaiPAY.files.wordpress.com/2008/03/west-papua.gif>)

This study belongs to a case study. The data were taken based on observations during the program, supported with analysis on the study progress reports. The data were then triangulated using various documents and interview with an informant and tutors.

B. THEORETICAL REVIEW

The theoretical review consists of literature related to education, especially to help learners to be successful in the class. It includes culture in the classroom, helping learners to become successful, using games with EFL learners, and repetition and learning. The explanation of each is as follows.

Culture in the Classroom

In the context of education, students' profile does not always go together with that of the teachers. They may come from various

culture. As educators, teachers are responsible for stimulating the varied students' intellectual development fully. Teachers can engage students by reaching out to them "in ways that are culturally and linguistically responsive and appropriate," and should avoid cultural assumptions and stereotypes that may hinder interconnectedness. To encourage students' participation effectively, teachers must possess good understanding of their students and their individual academic abilities. They should not depend on racial and ethnic stereotyping and/or generalize their past knowledge with students having similar background. Thus, to facilitate the learning, the curriculum should be designed in order to be culturally relevant. Such curriculum is essential to foster students' academic performance appropriately.

Helping Learners to Become Successful

Becoming a teacher is a challenging task which calls for patience, innovation, and motivation to produce comprehensive development on students. In the classroom teachers may find students with mixed ability levels. It is possible that some students cannot cope with the lessons taught or that they cannot get along well with their peers. Consequently, those learners are perceived as "slow learners." This situation yields a great challenge for teachers to come up with a solution.

Teachers are expected to be able to guide and help those learners make good progress, obtain good grades and eventually be successful in their learning. Slow learners are different from good students who can always attain good grades on his own without necessarily being helped by the teachers. However, slow learners cannot always make it. They need abundant help from their environment and it is the challenge that will determine the quality of a good teacher.

There are some ways that can be adopted to carry out the challenging task (http://www.examiner.com/article/two-bombs-explode-at-the-boston-marathon-what-to-say-to-your-kids?cid=taboola_inbound). Teachers should be responsible for building up confidence among slow learners and convincing them of their ability that they are no less than others. This is necessary because slow learners are very sensitive and well aware of their own weaknesses. They feel that they are far left behind others. Thus, teachers should provide encouragement and motivation which can influence students positively and boost their performance.

Teachers should also make an attempt to discover the reasons behind the learner's weak performance. In addition, they also need to strive to make learners perform well. To do this, they can make frequent contact with such learners in order that they can find ways to help the students improve.

Furthermore, teachers should provide extra care and practice to the slow

learners compared to other learners. They may also spend extra time outside regular classes to help learners individually. On that occasion, they can work out the problematic areas with them. They can find ways to help the learners study in an easy and simple way and give them additional home assignments which strengthen the lessons completed inside class.

Teachers should also pay attention sufficiently to students who are slow, and never encourage a feeling of inferiority to occur among them. They should be helped with various facilities, such as reference books, exercises, learning aids and the like, and their progress should be closely monitored. By so doing, teachers can find out whether the students respond positively to the teaching and whether or not changes or adjustment should be made.

Next, teachers should behave as friends for these learners because they normally need somebody to whom they can rely on. Feeling that they have company would enable them to manage to overcome their weaknesses. When they succeed, they will eventually make good progress.

Using Games with EFL Learners

EFL Learners refer to people who are learning English but they do not live in English speaking countries. EFL learners generally have "similar backgrounds but varied motivations" (Vernon, 2009). They are learning English especially for hobby or for work. To aid their learning, games are often used with these learners. Those games should be selected according to students' interests.

According to Vernon (2009), while the students are having fun in the class the games may be an excellent ways to work on exam topics. It is recommended that teachers tell their students what the game is reinforcing, so that they can be convinced about the benefits of what they are doing and be enthusiastic in doing it. Speaking games, listening games, rhythmic chants, songs, and

rhyiming games are a lot of fun and may be used with them. Reading or writing games may also be employed “by playing build-a-sentence or build-a-story games and then having the students actually write up the sentence or story they have just composed.” For more advanced students role plays and skits can be used because they often “bring out aspects of cross cultural communication that are taken for granted and not mentioned in books.”

Repetition in Learning

There is a well-known saying, “practice makes perfect.” This saying refers to the fact that repetition can improve learning. Hermann Ebbinghaus, the first researcher to carry out a prolonged series of experiments on human memory (1885), discovered that “retention of information improves as a function of the number of times the information has been studied.” (<http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G2-3407100205.html>). Repetition, according to Aspinwall (1912), is believed to be the most intuitive principle of learning, which has been employed since ancient Egyptian and Chinese education (<http://principlesoflearning.wordpress.com/dissertation/chapter-4-results/themes-identified/repetition/>).

Watson (1914) argued that repetition is one of the factors that establish a habit. It can sustain or produce a desired behavior. Repetitions are necessary to produce content from memory and to prevent forgetting (Ebbinghaus, 1913). The more the materials are repeated, the clearer and the longer they stay in memory. Further, repetition is viewed as crucial in knowledge acquisition (Sternberg & Williams, 2010). Students will gain deeper understanding whenever they can relate new experience to previous experience. Internalization takes place when there is repeated encounter.

Information retention can be improved by several ways outlined below. It is in fact a skill which can be learned (http://www.ehow.com/how_10005878_improve-retention-

information.html). In the first place, students should take notes of the lesson in class, because the act of writing engages the brain more fully and make it retain information. Next, they should repeat crucial information out loud. This is one way to exercising mind. To help students remember lists mnemonic can be created. Finally, quizzes should be given to facilitate practice. It is believed that they will improve recollection and retention.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The paper discusses two important parts. The first is the characteristics of Papuan students and the teaching strategies.

1. Characteristics of Papuan Students

Based on the reports of the teaching and learning in the previous batches and based on the results of assessments taken by the faculty and by the instructors, there are some learning difficulties found. The difficulties are as follows.

a. Language difficulties

Papua island has more or less 268 languages (<http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papua>). It may imply that language difficulties occur among the Papuans themselves. The unifying language, Bahasa Indonesia, is not sufficiently mastered. Therefore, when they interact with teachers in Java, language barrier might influence the learning activities. It sometimes creates problems in interacting with the instructors. They feel difficult in understanding instruction verbally. When the instructors speak in Bahasa Indonesia, they still hard to understand it.

b. Silence

The students tend to be silent during the learning process. They usually pay attention to the learning process. However, when they come to the discussion sessions, they often do not talk a lot or use most of the time for reading the instructions.

c. Learning Participation

Some students are active but some others are passive. However, once they feel

comfortable, they will be very active. When given questions, they usually answer them abruptly.

Secara keseluruhan Program Matrikulasi untuk siswa dari Pegunungan Bintang berjalan dengan sangat baik. Antusiasme dan keseriusan siswa dalam belajar sangat baik dan membuat segala kegiatan pelajaran maupun penyampaian pelajaran berjalan sangat baik. (Source: notes from a tutor: QY, 2009)

d. Students like singing, moving

The students are very antuciasitic when they are given songs, or games in the class activities.

e. They easily forget materials they learned

When being given exercises on the previous materials, they get unsatisfactory scores.

f. Interaction difficulties

When being asked to work in groups, they sit face to face, but still work individually. It may be due to reluctance to work with other tribal groups which have hierarchy. The differences their own language since they have so many different backgrounds of language add to the complications of working in groups.

Besides those mentioned characteristics, there are some other characteristics as follows.

- Most of the students have short attention span (source: teaching report)
- Mosy of them have a background of having interest in holding parties, including dancing and singing activities (source: informant)
- Most of the time, they have high motivation when they like certain thing. The following example is a

situation where students were facing an interview pretest on English competence.

When asked in English, they tried to respond in English even though the response was not appropriate.

Q: good morning, how are you?

A: I am P T (name).

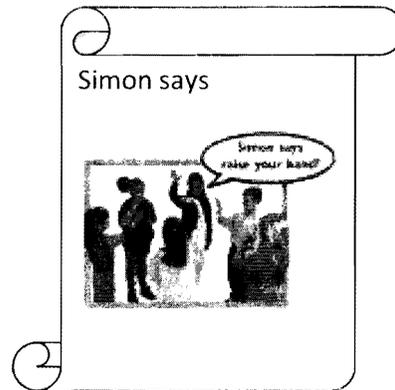
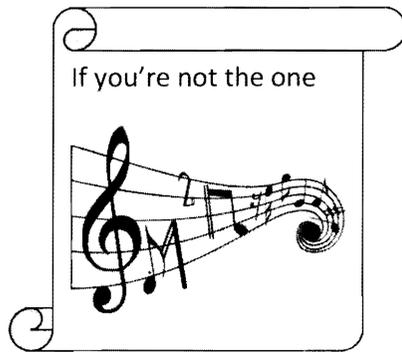
Q: What is your nick name?

A: 20.

2. Strategies in Teaching

The process of learning was given in different sections. Students learnt English in class sessions with two lecturers who were helped by four tutors of English. In addition, they also had tutorial sessions outside of the class. The class lesson is divided into grammar, reading, vocabulary and speaking sessions. The tutorial sessions were meant to support the lessons given by the lecturers. The exercises were given extensively and had similar themes. The teaching used various teaching techniques, e.g. using song, and story telling.

Materials need to be taught in small portion to accommodate their limited attention span. Therefore, the choice of reading was kept short to keep them focused on the materials. The materials were discrete materials (elements and skills) but they were supporting each other. Vocabulary and grammar were taught repetitively by employing competition games. The teaching of reading and speaking skills were meant to help the students understand textbooks and expressing ideas. In the reading activities, the lecturer used timed reading exercises and creating questions about the texts. Further, to avoid boredom, kinesthetic activities, singing and "dancing", are employed.



Picture 1: Songs and games were used in the class

The learning process revealed that the students happily responded to an English lesson using a song, e.g. If You're Not The One. First, they were asked to listen to a song and write the words they heard on the paper. Teaching excerpt 1 gave an example of a song used.

If You're Not The One
(by: Daniel Bedingfield)

If you're not the one then why does my soul
_____ (1) glad today?
If you're not the one then why does my hand
fit yours this way?
If you are not mine then why does your heart
return my call?
If you are not mine would I _____ (2)
the strength to stand at all?
I never know what the future brings
But I know you are here with me now
We'll _____ (3) it through
And I hope you are the one I share my life
with
I don't want to run away but I can't take it, I
don't _____ (4)
If I'm not made for you then why does my
heart tell me that I am?
Is there any way that I can stay in your arms?
If I don't need you then why am I
_____ (5) on my bed?
If I don't need you then why does your name
resound in my head?
If you're not for me then why does this
distance maim my life?

If you're not for me then why do I
_____ (6) of you as my wife?
I don't know why you're so far away
But I know that this much is true
We'll make it through
And I hope you are the one I _____ (7)
my life with
And I wish that you could be the one I die
with
And I pray in you're the one I build my home
with
I hope I love you all my life
I don't want to _____ (8) away but I
can't take it, I don't understand
If I'm not made for you then why does my
heart tell me that I am
Is there any way that I can stay in your arms?
'Cause I miss you, body and soul so strong
that it _____ (9) my breath away
And I breathe you into my heart and pray for
the strength to stand today
'Cause I _____ (10) you, whether it's
wrong or right
And though I can't be with you tonight
And know my heart is by your side
I don't want to run away but I can't take it, I
don't understand
If I'm not made for you then why does my
heart tell me that I am
Is there any way that I could stay in your
arms?

Teaching excerpt 1: A script of a song used
in the class

The focus is on the verbs and the blanks did
not occur too frequently. In teaching excerpt 1,

there are 10 blanks focusing on verbs, namely feel, have, make, understand, crying, dream, share, run, takes, and love. The occurrence of blanks on the song was not very frequent considering that students needed more time to focus on what they listened to and to write them on the paper.

D. CONCLUSIONS

Considering the unique characteristics of the Papuan students, specific techniques and materials are needed in order to run the program successfully. The learning process was conducted in class and outside of the class sessions. Interesting materials and teaching techniques were also used to make more facilitative class situations for study.

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