

MAXIMIZING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES CASE STUDY: SMP 4 MALANG

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Abstract

The process of education certainly involves several players such as educational administrators, policy makers, curriculum planners, teacher educators, textbook writers, and others in which each constituting an important link in the educational chain. However, the most important part here is the classroom teacher. They are the key of success or failures of an education. How the teachers teach in the classroom, the way to deliver the material and the way to engage the students to be active is being the big homework for the teachers. As teachers, they try to maximize learning opportunities for the students, minimizing mismatches between themselves and students, facilitating negotiated interaction and so on. For maximizing learning opportunities, teachers are not depending on the lesson plan, teaching materials and specific syllabus. Also, as the teachers, they try to involve the students by delivering some questions, for example. They ask students to answer the questions and talk actively in the classroom. This study aims to describe how English teacher in SMP 4 Malang deliver the questions to involve students in classroom in order to maximize learning opportunities. The questions can be display questions and referential questions. Referential questions are given to students in order to make them being more active and able to generate learning opportunities (Kumaravadivelu, 2003: 50).

1. Introduction

Nowadays, teacher is not only teaching in the classroom. They have much homework to prepare the student to face globalization era. The students should be prepared to have a creative thinking, flexible problem solving, collaboration and innovative skills they will need to be successful in work and life. Quality learning begins with quality teachers (Christine, et al., 2010).

Teacher can be as passive technician, Reflective Practitioners or Transformative Intellectual (Kumaravadivelu: 2003). It depends on the role of the teacher, how far the teacher involves to the success of the students, especially in language learning.

1. Teachers as Passive Technician

Viewing teachers as passive technicians is traditional and still vague. The technicians view provides a secure environment for teachers who may not have the ability or the willingness to explore self-initiated and teaching strategies. The teachers' function in the classroom is being like conduit the flow information from expert for example. Teacher as passive technician can be seen:

- a. Primary focus of teaching is content knowledge.
- b. Simply use “teacher-proof” packages.
- c. Professional experts create the knowledge base and teachers pass it on to students.
- d. Leads to disempowerment.

2. *Teachers as Reflective Practitioners*

Being a reflective practitioner means that we globally and critically consider the impact we have on student learning. Teachers are seen as problem solvers in a holistic approach that emphasizes creativity, artistry, and context sensitivity. Teachers must be self-critical to be productive. This role has only recently affected 2nd language teaching.

In Deweyan view (John Dewey is an educational philosopher) teaching is as a context-sensitive action grounded in intellectual thought and teachers as as problem-solvers possessing. There is a book titled *The Reflective Practitioner* by Don Schon in 1983. He shows how teachers are able to bring about fresh and fruitful perspectives. He differentiates between two frames of reflection: *reflection on- action and reflection-in- action*. Reflection-on-action happens before and after a lesson, as teachers plan for a lesson and then evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching acts afterward. Reflection-in-action happens during the teaching act when teachers monitor their ongoing performance.

Kenneth Zeichner and Daniel Liston in their book *Reflective Teaching: An Introduction*, 1996 sum up that reflective practitioner must:

- a. “examine, frame, and attempt to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice;
- b. aware of and questions the assumptions and values he or she brings to teaching;
- c. attentive to the institutional and cultural contexts in which he or she teaches;
- d. take part in curriculum development and is involved in school change efforts
- e. take responsibility for his or her own professional development”

Learning to teaching, actually is a process continuously which is not finished by obtaining diploma or a degree in teachers education.

3. *Teachers as Transformative Intellectual*

The idea of teachers as transformative intellectuals is derived mainly from the works of critical pedagogists. General educationists are such as Henry Giroux (1988), Peter McLaren (1995), and Roger Simon (1987), and language teaching professionals such as Elsa Auerbach (1995), Sarah Benesch (2001), and Alastair Pennycook (2001). They have been influenced by the educational philosophy of the Brazilian thinker Paulo Freire. As teachers we need to develop social, cultural, and political consciousness in our learners, and to do that teachers need to actually look at the classroom community as part of the larger social community. There is a tendency among some of our teachers to look at classroom as a mini-society.

Giroux in his 1988 book *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning* stated that “the role that teachers and administrators might play as transformative intellectuals who develop counterhegemonic pedagogies that not only empower students by giving them the knowledge and social skills they will need to be able to function in the larger society as critical agents, but also educate them for transformative action” (Giroux, 1988, p. xxxiii cited in *Beyond Method*). As transformative intellectuals, teachers are

engaged in a dual task: they strive not only for educational advancement but also for personal transformation.

The term postformal teachers as transformative intellectual, Joe Kincheloe (1993, pp. 201–3 in *Beyond Method*) sum up that teaching as:

- Inquiry oriented
- Socially contextualized
- Grounded on a commitment to world making
- Dedicated to an art of improvisation
- Dedicated to the cultivation of situated participation
- Extended by a concern with critical self-and social reflection
- Shaped by a commitment to democratic self-directed education
- Steeped in a sensitivity by pluralism
- Committed to action
- Concerned with the affective dimension of human being

Teachers are responsible for the success of the students. They take important position for that. They have to apply many strategies or techniques in teaching language. What strategy used by the teacher, they have to consider that strategy must maximize the learning opportunities. The students have to be involved in teaching learning process as much as possible, meaning that they should be active students, instead of the passive ones. In this case, teachers should think how to create the situation so the learners are able to maximize their learning opportunities.

Allwright (1986) as cited by Kumaravadivelu (2003) defines classroom instruction as “the interactive process whereby learning opportunities are created.” We see from this definition that learning opportunity is able to be created by the interaction in the classroom. The classroom here is the interactive process, meaning that students and teacher are important players in this position. In other words, to maximize the learning opportunities, one cannot depend on the teacher only, but the students themselves as well.

In order to maximize learning opportunities, we also have to emphasize the time allotment. The students’ achievement cannot be separated with the academic learning time (PSEA, 2011). Increasing instructional time in school is considered to be the way to maximize learning opportunities. The other way to maximize learning opportunities is by delivering questions. Questions are the most common way that can be used in all level of learners (Willen: 1987). Questioning techniques will be able to engage students in teaching learning process. They have to be active in the classroom because of the questioning techniques which is delivering by the teacher. Teacher always play crucial position in order to make the teaching learning process run well. Teacher has to do some techniques to involve students and make them to be active in the classroom. The description above provides the reason to create meaningful interaction as one way to maximize learning opportunities especially in the classroom is by questioning.

This present study tries to see the teaching learning process in order to maximize learning opportunities: The case of SMP 4 Malang. This study focuses on to identify the teacher’s way to engage students in teaching learning process in order to make student being active and able to learn English. The learning opportunities are not totally depending on the teacher, but both teachers and students are being the most valuable players in

managing the creation and utilization of learning opportunities in the classroom. Therefore, this study is going to describe the teaching learning process in the classroom in order to create learning opportunities.

2. Research Question

This question is explored in this study:

How does the teaching and learning process at SMP 4 Malang in order to maximize learning opportunities?

3. Research method

This research is a case study in English Language Teaching at SMP 4 Malang. This study used observation as the main source of the data, teacher's interview and students' interview.

3.1. Observation

The researcher conducted observation in the classroom when teaching learning English process is running. The teaching learning English was observed by the researcher to identify the teacher's way in teaching English in order to maximize learning opportunities, the teacher and students' interaction and the teacher's effort to engage students in teaching learning English in the classroom.

3.2. Teacher's interview

The researcher interviewed the teacher after observing teaching learning process in the classroom. The purpose was to explore the teacher's reasons in delivering some questions and giving the students some tasks in order to maximize learning opportunities. The researcher conducted interview in order to know the teacher's problem in the classroom when they had to face many students with different background, attitude and ability.

3.3. Students' interview

The researcher also conducted interview for the students. The purpose was to explore the students' response about the way the teacher teaches in the classroom. They asked some questions related with the opportunities in learning English in classroom area, whether they have learnt English maximally as the learning opportunities which is given by the teacher or not yet. The researcher also tried to see the students' difficulties in the classroom while teaching and learning process is running.

4. Research setting

This research was conducted in SMP 4 Malang in second grade students. This school was chosen because of the accessibility, and availability.

5. Result and Discussion

After conducting observation and interview with the teacher and student, the researcher got the data to be analyzed. Kumaravadivelu (2003) states that we need to know the factor that facilitates the teacher to maximize learning opportunities:

1. Not depends on the teacher lesson plan

The researcher conducted an observation in SMP 4 Malang. After observing, researcher also interviewed the English teacher. She said that she had made the lesson plan at the early semester, but in general.

Based on Kumaravadivelu's book, one of the ways to maximize learning opportunities is not bound by the teachers' agenda or lesson plan. The teacher did it. The teacher explained that we cannot depend on the lesson plan because we have to adjust it based on what happens in the field. What the teacher did is the way as an effort to maximize learning opportunities.

2. Not depends on teaching material

While researcher was observing, the teacher used the material from the book. At that time, the teacher used song as the main source of discussion. Along with the observation, it seems that the teacher was not bound by the material of the book totally. She used the material from the book, but the teacher made the exercises by herself, such as giving the questions related to the song. The teacher tries to explore the students' comprehension of the song.

If the teacher was bound by the material on the book only, the students should only look for the meaning of the word, but at that time the students were asked to answer the questions in written form. The researcher considered this strategy also as the effort to maximize learning opportunities.

The teacher sometimes uses the material such as from the internet to find the interesting material. She wants her students to explore more; not only providing what is stated on the textbook.

3. Not depends on specific syllabus

Talking about syllabus, a syllabus is more a teaching organizer than a learning indicator (Kumaravadivelu: 2008). In case of SMP 4 Malang that the researcher has observed and interviewed, the teacher explained that the material given is based on the syllabus. But for the material itself, the teacher always explores more. What the teacher did is a good idea in order to explore more about the material, because the classroom teacher is the one who knows very well the situation in the classroom. Therefore, everything should be made appropriate with the fact in that field, in this case in the classroom context.

Kumaravadivelu (2003) states that creation and application of learning opportunities in the classroom depends on the teacher and students who are involved in teaching learning process. The key is interaction between the teacher and students which have to be interactive process. It will maximize the teacher and students' roles in the classroom.

Learning Opportunities Inside and Outside the Classroom

1. Learner Involvement

It is very crucial to involve students in teaching learning process (Shamim, Negash, Chuku, & Demewoz, 2007). They have to be involved for every activity in the classroom, they have to be active. Kumaravadivelu (2003) also states that the best way to maximize

learning opportunities is by engaging students meaningfully. Engaging students is not always being easy. The teacher has to do some techniques for that. It has strong relation with the motivation in learning, especially in language learning. Language teacher has to see it more than interest, because language is a skill which need to applied to marely keep in head or admired at a distance (Richards, 2002:40)

From the case of SMP 4 Malang that researcher has observed, researcher cannot find the meaningful interaction. The students seemed to be so passive at that time. The teacher has tried to give question, and their answers could not be heard clearly. At that time, the teacher also delivered a few questions to the students and we can see minimal interaction between teacher and students.

Learners' involvement will help both teacher and students in making choices. The students can find their own way in learning and the teacher can create the optimal condition for learning to maximize learning opportunities. In case of SMP 4 Malang, the teacher admitted that first graders of junior high school still find difficulties in learning English. When teacher delivered the question, not all students understood what she asked. The teacher then repeated the question; both in English and Indonesian. Teacher expects the students to answer the question in English and the others will listen to him/her. Listening to other students' talk in English is considered as one way to maximize learning opportunities. Kumaravadivelu (2003) states that recognizing the learners' speak means recognizing students' attempt to create learning opportunities for the speaker himself and the other participants in the classroom. When the students talk, even it is a question or an answer of a certain question, they may create learning opportunities. In case of SMP 4, students' involvement is still limited. The teacher at least has already tried to involve students.

2. Teacher Questioning

From the aforementioned explanation we know that interaction in the classroom is important to maximize learning opportunities. One way that a teacher can do to initiate the interaction is by questioning (Brown, 2007). The opening questions delivered by the teacher in the class right after playing the song are considered as display questions, meaning that the teacher already knows the expected answer given by the students. Although display questions are beneficial and common to be used in the classroom, too much time spent for them should be avoided since it will not trigger students to think critically and that will not give students opportunity to answer beyond the text (Brown, 2007). In the class that the researcher observed, when the students could not answer the question, the teacher directly answered it without asking for others' opinion. Probably, it is because she had lost a chance to engage students' minds because she did not give further clue to make students know the answer she expected. In other words, she lost a chance to generate learning opportunities.

In the first session of the lesson after delivering the opening questions, the teacher asked students to work in group of four. They were given some questions to be discussed and answered. The questions were firstly delivered in oral and then written on the white board one by one. The questions written are: (1) What words come the most time? (2) What message contained in the song?. To avoid the mismatch between what teacher wanted and what students thought they were asked to, the teacher repeated the questions,

gave the examples and explained what she meant by “word”. After the first question was given, the teacher waited for some minutes. Since students’ responses were not satisfying for the teacher then she directly skipped it without giving the correct answers. In the second session, the teacher asked the students to work individually. She gave five questions consisting choice question, product question, and process questions. Since it was individual work, no discussion was allowed. The questions were delivered in English and Indonesian.

After the class was over, researcher also conducted an interview with one of students regarding the learning opportunities the teacher may provide. She admitted that teacher seldom delivers questions orally to the students. Once the teacher gives the questions and no satisfying responses were heard, the teacher herself simply gives the answer. This statement is supported by the result of the class observation. Being asked whether the teacher encourages students to keep diaries or journals to write any issues regarding the teaching and learning process, the student had no idea about it. Moreover, she said that the teacher mostly uses materials from the *LKS (Lembar Kerja Siswa)* which means new teaching materials are rarely adapted or created. In a nutshell, learning opportunity outside the classroom is not maximized.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, the teacher has tried to maximize the learning opportunities by not be bind to the teacher’s agenda or lesson plan, material within the book and syllabus. The teacher has adjusted the material based on the situation in the field which means she did not take material from the book totally. During the teaching and learning process, the teacher delivered some questions, however, teacher questioning does seem to be effective because it does not offer students’ involvement, thereby failing to create the learning opportunities. Since teacher’s role in the classroom is the fundamental thing, teacher has responsibility to create the situation where the students are involved or utilize the learning opportunities that may be created by students themselves.

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