

PROJECT WORK WITH PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT TO HELP STUDENTS ACQUIRE ACTION RESEARCH COMPETENCE

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Abstract

Action research competence is a crucial component of teacher's professionalism. This competence not only includes the mastery of knowledge of action research but also many skills and especially certain attitudes in successfully doing the research. To help students develop this competence, a research course presented in a specific strategy is needed. Project based learning completed with portfolio assessment is considered effective for this purpose. Project based learning enables the students to actively search for the information they need, practice expressing ideas and arranging them in good written English, working collaboratively with other people, being open and critical. Portfolio assessment enables the teacher to see students' work and progress from time to time and give necessary feed backs to direct students' learning. Self assessment, which is a part of portfolio assessment, enables the students to reflect their learning to see what they have got and what they haven't, so that they can strive to reach the learning goals. At the end of the semester, the students are ready with their action research proposals.

Introduction

The ability to conduct reflective teaching is a must for teachers in order to improve their teaching. Action research is a research done by teachers in which they reflect their teaching. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988: 5) define action research as a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out. Language teachers are encouraged to conduct action research, which is a research in their own classroom, so that they can generate new understanding and knowledge of their own workplaces. Reflective teaching in action research is one form of teacher professional development. In order to equip its students with this ability, a teacher training institution provides action research subjects in its curriculum.

In the curriculum of English Education Study Program (EESP) of Yogyakarta State University (UNY – *Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta*), research subjects are provided in several courses namely Education Research, and English Teaching and Learning Research (ETLR), or previously called English Language Classroom Research (ELCR). Education research is meant to provide students with knowledge and clear

understanding of research methodology commonly used in education while English Teaching and Learning Research (ETLR) is meant to provide students with the ability to plan and conduct a study on English Teaching and Learning in a classroom. There are two big aims of these subjects, firstly, to prepare students with the ability to develop their profession as teachers in the future, and secondly, to equip students with the ability to plan and conduct a research project in order to graduate.

In order to graduate from English Education Study Program of UNY, a student must write a *skripsi* (undergraduate theses) based on research and written in English, as his/her final project. This requirement is thought of as one that makes students unable to graduate on time. Ideally students can finish an undergraduate program in four years or less, but students of EESP UNY generally finish their study in five years or more, even some fails to complete the final project and considered drop-outs due to the fact that they have spent seven years in this institution, yet unable to complete their study.

Writing *skripsi* in EESP UNY is considered a tough job. Students not only have to master research methodology, TEFL methodology, but also strong command of English. Not only knowledge of these subjects must the students possess, but also certain skills and attitudes needed for doing scientific matters. Knowledge is relatively easy to get, but skills, and even positive attitude are really hard to develop. Attending lectures in classes, or reading books assigned by the teachers, students can get good understanding of what research is and how to do it. They can answer questions in their exam and they may get a very good grade in the subject. However, good grades do not guaranty success in completing *skripsi* writing in time. There are so many factors affecting it. English writing Skills and positive attitude in completing study in time need emphasizing. Due to this fact, ETLR course assumes a very strategic position both for preparing students to be professional teachers in the future and also for helping them with their final project. To achieve this aims, this course must be presented in a certain way in which students get clear understanding of what and how to conduct an English Teaching and learning research, develop skills in communicating with other people, skill in expressing the ideas in good written English, as well as develop positive attitude needed in scientific jobs, such as being critical, democratic, collaborative, reflective, disciplined, and so on. Project work accompanied with certain technique of assessment, portfolio assessment, is considered effective to reach the aims. This paper is a reflection of what I have done to help my students learn action research in my ETLR class.

Project Work

Project work is a piece of work assigned to students to accomplish in a period of time. It can be done in a classroom setting in which students learn by doing to produce a piece of work. Wang Ge (2006) states that project-based learning is learning activities in which students are given a project, either problems to solve, questions to answer, task to perform, or product to develop. Project-based learning is based on purposeful learning (Dewey, 1938), social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978), and discovery learning (Bruner, 1996). According to the constructivists, people construct knowledge on the basis of their experience. Therefore, students need opportunities in the classroom to learn through experience and experimentation.

He also mentions some advantages of using project-based learning such as that: 1) it can motivate students by engaging them in their learning. It provide opportunity for students to pursue their own interests and questions and to make decisions about how they will find answers and solve problems; 2) It also provides opportunities for interdisciplinary learning. Students apply and integrate the contents of different subject areas at authentic moments in the production process instead of in isolation or in an artificial setting; 3) It makes learning relevant and useful to students by establishing connections to life outside the classroom, addressing real world concerns, and developing marketable skills.

Portfolio Assessment

A portfolio is a collection of a student's work. Portfolios used in a classroom setting have the basic purpose that is to collect a series of student performances or products that is intended to show the student's accomplishment or improvement over time. Portfolios are more than folders that hold all of a student's work. They contain a consciously selected sample of a student's work that is intended to show growth and development toward some important curriculum goal (Airasian, 1994).

There are many advantages of the use of portfolios for learning assessment, i.e. making students part of the assessment process, giving students and teachers a perspective on student progress or improvement, providing concrete examples of students work, focusing instruction on important performance activities, helping assess curriculum needs, showing students the importance of performance, providing specific products that can be used for diagnosis, and assembling cumulative evidence and perspective on student's learning (Airasian 1994). The most valuable aspect of portfolio assessment is that it links assessment with instruction. It means that a student's performance is evaluated in relation to instructional goals, objectives and classroom activities. Portfolio contents should

represent what students are doing in the classroom and reflect their progress toward instructional goals (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996).

Successful portfolio assessment needs careful plan and preparation. These include establishing (1) a clear purpose, (2) performance criteria, (3) an appropriate setting, and (4) predetermined rating or scoring criteria (Airasian, 1994). In relation to this, Valdez Pierce and Gottlieb (1994) in O'Malley and Pierce, (1996) propose more steps in planning portfolio assessment including 1) setting a purpose, 2) matching content to purpose, 3) setting criteria, 4) setting standards of performance, and 5) getting students involved.

Project work and Portfolio Assessment to help students acquire action research competence

Teaching Preparation

Before assigning a project work for students, we need to clarify the curriculum and specify the nature of the subject to teach. Action research is taught in the course called *English Teaching and Learning Research (ETLR)*. ETLR is a subject in English Education Department, and based on the course description, this course is meant to provide students with knowledge, skills and attitudes needed as a professional English teacher in conducting research in their own field. In the curriculum of English Education Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Arts Yogyakarta State University 2008, it is stated clearly that English Teaching and Learning Research (Code: PEN 213) provides sets of knowledge and trains a set of skills. This unit is an attempt to arouse student awareness towards scientific research particularly those related to English language teaching in the Indonesian context. The knowledge covers ontology, epistemology and axiology of the research. The skills cover the search, the titling and theoretizing research problems and the choosing of the forms and the contents of instruments with the discussion, and summarizing the data analysis. The set of attitudes cover rational, objective, critical, skeptical (open), cooperative, and responsible related to the attitudes to do the research. Based on the course description, the syllabus can be prepared.(appendix 1)

Based on the curricular objectives and subject contents above, the course is planned as follows: To get the research knowledge the students are assigned to read books. To show their understanding, and at the same time to develop students' writing skill and positive attitude, they are given tasks. They

are supposed to write several pieces of writing related to the topics discussed. At the end they have to write a research proposal. This way, the students are helped to write a research proposal step by step. Here are the tasks or pieces of writing that the students have to write: 1) a summary showing the differences of some research approaches: positivistic, naturalistic, and action research, 2) Examples of research titles commonly proposed in researches from various approaches, 3) definitions of action research proposed by many experts, 4) steps in conducting action research proposed by many experts, 5) Action Research method: how to collect, analyze, and validate the data in action research, and how to report the action research, 6) a description of an English teaching learning process in a classroom that a student has observed completed with problem analysis or identification, and 7) a research project proposal. Students' work or students' performance is assessed using portfolio. Portfolio assessment is planned as follows:

1. Setting a clear purpose

The purpose of the portfolio is to assess the student learning and achievement in the subject. It is to see whether the students have acquired the knowledge and theory how to conduct a research on English Teaching and Learning Research, whether they are able to formulate a research title, identifying existing problems in an English classroom setting, formulating research problems, stating research objectives and defining significances of their research result. It is also to see whether they are able to review literatures related to their topics and presenting their review in written forms, and to plan the method how to do their research. And it is also to see whether they are rational, objective, critical, skeptical, cooperative, and responsible in doing their tasks.

2. Matching the portfolio contents with the purpose

To show that students have followed and are reaching the qualities stated in the curriculum objectives, each student of the class is required to prepare a portfolio containing a collection of student work related to the tasks given, students reflection in following the learning activities and producing the work, student self assessment in the form of checklist, and also teacher assessment. A collection of student work related to the tasks includes the seven pieces of writing having been stated previously: 1) a summary showing the differences of some research approaches: positivistic, naturalistic, and action research, 2) Examples of research titles commonly proposed in researches from various approaches, 3) definitions of action research proposed by many experts, 4) steps in conducting action research proposed by many experts, 5) ways to conduct action research: how to collect, analyze, and validate the

data in action research, and how to report the action research, 6) a description of an English teaching learning process in a classroom that a student has observed completed with problem identification, and 7) a research project proposal.

3. Identifying criteria for Assessment

Each entry of student work will be assessed based on the content, coverage, language used, and style. The content of student work must be conceptually and theoretically correct. Coverage here means that each student writing must include all aspects or elements of the topic being discussed. Language used means that each student writing must be written in good English, no grammar mistakes, no misspelling, and no wrong punctuation. While style here means how or in what form of writing the students present their work.

4. Determining standards of Student Performance

Student performance will be assessed through the following: the completeness, punctuality, and the quality of student writing. Completeness means that the collection of each student's work must include all tasks given by the teacher. There are seven tasks altogether (see no.2, Contents of student portfolio). Punctuality means that the students should submit their work on time, not later than the date having been decided. And the last one is the quality of student writing. The Student writing will be assessed based on certain criteria (see no. 3, Criteria for Assessment).

5. Preparing scoring instruments for student work and performance

Once criteria for assessment and standards of performance have been determined, we can prepare instruments to evaluate student performance. The instruments include a check list for student self-assessment, rating scales to assess student work, and a scoring rubric to categorize student performance.

6. Getting Students involved

Students will be involved in the portfolio assessment since the first meeting of the term. When the teacher meets the students in the class at the first meeting of the semester, he/ she inform the students what they are going to do during the semester. The teacher discusses with the students what pieces of writing they have to produce, what books they have to read, when or on what date they should submit their writing. He/she also informs the criteria on which their work will be assessed, and how to meet the standards of performance to get the grade they want in this subject.

The teaching Process

This course is done in one semester from February to June, or 16 weeks. Every week there is a meeting in a classroom to assign a certain task, to discuss the previous task and students' writing, to give feedback and some clarification. Students are given some time to revise their writing, and then put their work in their folders. Beside the pieces of writing they have to make, students also write a reflection of their learning.

Related to other subjects, Teaching Practicum (PPL) and Community Service (KKN), in the semester when students are taking this course, they are given two weeks -opportunity to observe the teaching learning process in the schools they will use as their PPL and KKN place. This observation is meant to help students in preparing the program for their KKN and PPL. Through the program, the students are able to observe the teaching learning process of English at schools, ask questions to the English teacher, write the description of the English teaching learning process, analyzing it, find problems and then write a research proposal.

In writing the research proposal, students are guided from step to step. First, they write the description of the teaching learning process of English they have observed. Then they analyze it to find problems existing there. From here they choose a concern and state a research title. Once they have determined the title they can start writing the proposal. Second, in order to conform the desired format, they are suggested to read the Skripsi writing guide and examine the format of skripsi in the faculty library. Third, they write the background or rationale of their research, identify the problems, formulating the research problems, stating the research objectives, and states the significance of the research. Fourth, they have to read literatures related to their topics, and write the literature review. Next, they state how their research will be carried out. They make use of their knowledge of action research they have learnt so far in this part. Finally they arrange all their work to produce an action research proposal.

At the end of the semester, students submit their portfolios, including their research proposals, and also fill in self assessment forms.

The Finding

English Teaching and Learning Research course presented using the technique of project work, assessed by the use of portfolio technique is considered effective to help students acquire action research

competence due to the fact that in doing the tasks assigned by the teacher or in doing the project students have the opportunity to:

- 1) actively search for information by themselves. They read books, browse internet, ask other people and then write what they have found, bring it to the class for discussion. In the class they can clarify their understanding, add more points, get feedbacks for their work, revise it, and put it in the folder;
- 2) get enough writing practice. They have to write many pieces of writing, communicate them with other students, discuss them and revise them so that they are able to write better;
- 3) get used to managing the time well. Upon receiving the task, students need to work immediately so that they can keep up with the schedule, and able to submit the work on time.
- 4) develop positive attitudes, such as being open minded, critical, democratic, collaborative, reflective, needed in conducting action research.
- 5) have an experience in writing an action research proposal and able to produce one. This proposal can be a starting point of their skripsi writing project in order to graduate from the institution.

Despite the good result of the implementation of project work assessed by the use of portfolio technique, there are still many weaknesses to overcome.

- 1) English competence of a few students is really low that they find it really difficult to read literatures as well as to write their ideas in English. It is really hard for me in guiding them to accomplish the tasks and in helping them write a research proposal.
- 2) The time provided for the course is very limited. Therefore students stop on the proposal only.
- 3) The research proposals that the students have made cannot always be realized in research projects due to the fact that the research consultants the students get in their skripsi writing may not accept them or agree with them. That is why the students have to start their skripsi writing project from the very beginning.

Conclusion

Action research competence, which is a part of teacher professional ism, is developed through research courses offered in Teacher Training Institution. This competence covers knowledge, skills, and attitude needed in conducting classroom research. To develop this competence, specific teaching and learning

strategy is needed so that students can master it. Project work completed with portfolio assessment is suitable for this purpose. Through this technique, students actively search for information by themselves, get enough writing practice; get used to managing the time well; develop positive attitudes, such as being open minded, critical, democratic, collaborative, reflective, needed in conducting action research; and have an experience in writing an action research proposal and able to produce one. Learning by doing and learning from experience help students acquire the knowledge, the skills, and positive attitudes required for developing action research competence.

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