

# Using Literary Texts to Improve Students' Motivation and Understanding on *Introduction to British Culture* Course

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**Abstract:** This classroom action research aims to improve the teachers' way in instructing students of Introduction to British Culture course which consists of 33 students. It then makes easy and pleasant to understand the topics given. In this case, we use literary texts as well as textbooks to understand the culture of British society. From the results of comparison, this research is conducted for one semester starting with the mid-semester exam, the method of learning used is the usual method through discussion of British cultural topics. While the method of learning given after mid-semester to the final exam of the semester applies Classroom Action Research (CAR) based on the theory [1]. The result of the research, at the beginning of the session until the end of the semester, the students' motivation in learning when using literary texts is more enthusiastic and creative, especially in reading the material rather than just discussing cultural topics determined in the previous class. Discussions using literary texts to understand British culture are also warmer than before. The level of student participation and understanding is also higher when using literary texts. It is proved that the final exam score is mostly higher than a mid-semester test score. It is interesting to conclude that the level of understanding students' British culture is not determined whether the literary work is classical or contemporary but the decisive is the style of the author in describing the literary works.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

*Introduction to British Culture* is one of the compulsory cultural subjects in the English Department of the Faculty of Humanities, Andalas University which is offered in semester 4. The material discussed is everything related to British culture such as the history of United Kingdom, education, social life of the community, social strata of English Society, language, culture and also included the ethics as well as the latest issues in British society, such as sports and drama.

This course aims to provide students with any knowledge related to the topics that are given. Besides, this course is also designed to improve the students' skills such as speaking, grammar and gain more English vocabularies.

So far, the methods of the learning process in this course are the lecturer or students to prepare the powerpoint taking from related references.

The method applied to arise the problem during the learning process, one of them is students' lower understanding of the materials given. This result is based on the assessment given in the first 10 minutes

in every meeting and mid-semester test. To improve the quality of learning outcomes, the teaching material is modified by replacing it with short stories and drama scripts. Besides that, supporting material is also provided.

Based on the results of the mid-semester test in written form through questions to semester 4th students of English Department which were conducted at the beginning before the researcher applied the learning method plan using literary texts and communicative approach, most of the students have low or very low test results. It is indicated by most of them answer the question unsatisfied.

Hence, this class is deliberately chosen to be included in the Classroom Action Research. Based on the phenomenon above, the purpose of this study is to explain how far giving literary reading material can improve the speaking ability and its influencing factors to English Department students, Faculty of Humanities, Andalas University. The research is beneficial for lecturers to create an innovation and apply this method to improve the quality of the learning process in the lesson they teach.

Therefore, [2] given a reason for action research is the systematic collection of information which is constructed to accomplish social change. Furthermore, [3] to specify that Classroom Action Research is research established in the classroom and no more than explore what happens inside the classroom and it serves classroom communication and interaction as the best way to do expectedly. [4] as stated, "Action Research is a process in which educators examine their practice systematically and carefully using the techniques of research". The researchers conform with this remark which is relevant to our research.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Learning Method Developed

The learning process that has been carried out so far is in the form of a small group presentation consisting of two people alternating each week. Lecturers still have great authority in providing explanations and regulating the student activities at each meeting. Students are only responsible for carrying out group presentations followed by discussion, question and answer, and doing assignments.

### 2.2 The assessment applied in measuring student learning outcome so far

The measurement applied so far is in the form of attendance value, the readiness for presentation, understanding, activeness and the role in group work. Besides, there is also an assessment of midterm exams, semester exams and assignment scores. The assessment consists of:

Group presentation	: 10%
Attendance	: 10%
Activeness	: 10%
Attitude	: 10%
Task	: 10%
Mid-Test	: 25%
Final Test	: 25%

#### *Final grade distribution in the previous semester*

Generally, the distribution of student grades are B- to B +, meanwhile A-, A is very little in percentage. Based on the researcher's experience in teaching 2016 students, they have low motivation and understanding, lack of reading, lack of discipline, inactive in answering the question and have no preparation before coming to class. External factors come from the lecturer. In this case, the researchers

themselves about the cultural awareness teaching method she has applied to the students who are less attractive. At that time the researcher focused on the learning process of understanding the topic of presentations and discussions rather than applying direct practicing about these aspects of culture in pragmatic speaking communication.

### 2.3 The Learning Method Developed in This Classroom Action Research

There are some steps in research as cited [5] 1. Identifying questions, 2. Literature review, 3. research study planning, 4. Data collection, 5. Analyzing data, 6. Taking action based on results and 7. Here the researchers do not take all of the Gwynns' steps. We have taken once which apply to our case. To identify a question, the researchers have 10 until 15 minutes at the beginning of the class, such as how many of them have read the assignments given before coming to class, what things do the texts make them interested, etc. Then to plan a strategy, we gather data about individual students but collectively to all students. In analyzing data, we search our teaching strategy results better on students' answering the questions, performance on a presentation of the material to class, followed by discussion, exams compared between mid-test and the final test. The next step is to take action based on results. This research finding will inform to our teaching decision; it is suggested that if the new strategy improves the student learning, it should be used to continue in the teaching context. Then the last one but not least is sharing CAR findings [6]

## 3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The literary texts that we have given to the students are *Pride and Prejudice* written by Jane Austen, *Pygmalion* written by Goerge Bernard Shaw, *Complicity* by Julian Barnes and *The Happy Prince* by Oscar Wilde. Besides reading the literary texts, the students also read other textbooks to understand the text and the context conclusively.

Before having interpretation related to the culture, there are some identifying questions, asking the students the intrinsic elements in order to comprehend the text intensively. They have to understand the first characters, themes and plot. The students have to be able to determine what are the characters' significant traits, such as ambitious, doubting, anxious, aggressive, timid, noisy, practical, straightforward, etc., [7] Before the presenters take their time, the

lecturer take ahead for 10 or 15 minutes to ask the class about the intrinsic elements. It is the way to lead them interpreting the text in details. The result is very satisfying.

The learning process in the *Introduction to British Culture* so far is in the form of presentations and discussions by giving topics from the textbook. The students are divided into some groups of two or three people. Each group has one topic to be presented. *Introduction to British Culture* relates to British culture which also included an assessment, oral quizzes and evaluation. Lecturers still have great authority in providing explanations and regulating student activities at each meeting. Students are only responsible for carrying out group presentations followed by discussion, question and answer and doing assignments. In the last half semester, the material was replaced with literary text. Students are assigned to read and discuss short stories or drama scripts at home. In the first 15 minutes, the lecturer will give an oral quiz to ascertain whether the student has read the material provided and the supporting material. After that, the student does a presentation followed by question and answer.

Then the time for presenters conveys their topic more or less 10 minutes by having powerpoint with 10-12 slides. We have a warm discussion; they give an argument with their interpretation. It is very interesting because they would have more questions and argument compared to the previous methods. During the discussion session, the questions and comments are not always answered by the presenters but the audience can help them. One thing that the students should be aware that their discussion as well as the topics should be led to supporting books given to them.

*Pygmalion*, a play written by George Bernard Shaw describes the social status in English society of how the language is spoken by the working and middle-class people in 19<sup>th</sup> century of England. It seems that the people belong to the working class can shift to a higher class; it is not easy sometimes to change one's identity. She finds another way to lift her class by finding a rich man to marry. For this case students also read *Class : The Devastingly funny expose of the English Class System* written by Jilly Cooper published in 1980.

In the last session, the lecturer adds, corrects and explains the things that left. In the last meeting, the students are given the questions as instruments to answer directly on a piece of paper. It is suggested not to write their name to establish feeling free in writing their impression about the class.

- What do you think having used the literary text in this *Introduction to British Culture* class?
- Do you feel you get improvement in understanding the material of your speaking skills?
- How many percents you would prepare the material before the class for each text?
- Which level you belong to the difficulties of understanding the literary text?
- Do you think you get improvement in class activity?

The Answers:

- Almost 90 % of the students have answered that by having the literary texts, the class becomes interesting. This way helps them to understand the British Culture. Since literary texts in the form of a short story or play, it is not too long and not wasting time. Two students answer are not efficient and they are not interested to read the texts.
- Most of them answered "Yes", because it is their sessions to speak, like presenting the paper, automatically they should prepare themselves how to speak well in front of the class. Q&A session does help them to increase their ability in speaking.
- Most of them prepare themselves reading material between 60 – 80 %.
- The difficulties depend on the texts. *Pygmalion* and *The Happy Prince* are okay for them but the other two are difficult.
- Most of them answered "Yes", these improved their activity in the class.

Before conducting the research, the distribution of student grades, is generally in B to A-. This grade is quite good considering that the students are excellent of those who have English competence. However, the grade of students' speaking ability has not been maximized to get an A score (although there are some who get an A). Based on the researcher's experience in teaching English for class A, students are generally lack of discipline, they do not ask questions actively and did not prepare themselves to speak before coming to class, only practice their English speaking outside the classroom. External factors come from the lecturer. In this case, it is the researcher himself about the methods of teaching English that she has applied to students. Researchers at that time focused on their teaching and learning of the student presentations and discussions on aspects of English grammar in the context of British culture. It may be the reason that the method applied makes the class unpleasant, not challenging, not explorative, unnatural and the

lecturer centered learning that makes the students less enthusiastic about being active in speaking English. The measurement of student learning is in the form of attendance, the readiness for presentation, understanding, grammar, fluency, activeness and the role in group work. This course is assessed through the oral presentations, papers and discussions in final or semester test. Based on these elements, among 33 students; 6 students get A, 10 students get A-, 10 students get B+ and the rests get B until D.

## 4 CONCLUSION

Classroom Action Research (CAR) for *Introduction to British Culture* is conducted to improve the learning to a better result. Before this research is conducted there are some weaknesses, such as the students' motivation to prepare the topics given is low, the students' activity during the class is not lively and the result or grade they get is low. By having done the research, the situation of the class changes. They have the motivation to read the material before the class. The discussion session becomes energetic and enjoyable. Everybody wants to comment during the discussion session. Undoubtedly, most of the grades are satisfied.

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## APPENDIX

If any, the appendix should appear directly after the references without numbering, and not on a new page.