

Students' Perception Toward English, Extended English Class, And English Materials

Persepsi Mahasiswa terhadap Mata Kuliah, Kelas Ekstensif, dan Materi Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris

Ali Murtopo¹⁾

¹⁾ Staf Pengajar Jurusan Ekonomi dan Bisnis Politeknik Negeri Lampung

Abstrak

Sebagian besar perguruan tinggi hanya mengalokasikan 2 sks untuk mata kuliah Bahasa Inggris selama masa studi mahasiswa di perguruan tinggi. Akan tetapi Politeknik Negeri Lampung mengalokasikan lebih dari 2 sks, yaitu 10 sks, dan memprioritaskan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris Umum (general English) karena mahasiswa dianggap belum memiliki kompetensi bahasa Inggris yang baik. Meskipun demikian, kebijakan tersebut belum mempertimbangkan aspek kebutuhan dan harapan mahasiswa, permintaan pasar kerja, harapan orang tua, dan lain-lain sebelum diterapkan. Tulisan ini dibuat untuk membahas masalah tersebut dari sudut pandang mahasiswa, yakni mendiskusikan harapan dan kebutuhan kebahasaan mahasiswa dan apakah program tersebut dianggap baik atau tidak oleh mahasiswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan rancangan studi kasus deskriptif kualitatif untuk menguraikan data. Pengumpulan data dilakukan terhadap 55 mahasiswa yang diambil secara acak dengan pola interval berpartisipasi dalam pengisian kuesioner dan wawancara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar mahasiswa memandang mata kuliah Bahasa Inggris secara positif dan juga menganggap baik program pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris yang diperluas. Selain itu, mahasiswa cenderung lebih menginginkan bahasa Inggris umum dari pada bahasa Inggris khusus (English for Specific Purpose).

Kata Kunci: General English, English for Specific Purpose, Extended English Class,

Background

In the Curriculum of State Polytechnic of Lampung, the subjects are classified into three categories: general, basic science, and the core subjects. Each of which has its own goals for students to reach. From the three programs, the core subjects receive the most emphasis. It is in

line with the objective of the polytechnic education system, i.e. to produce skilled graduates, mastering applied science, in the field of agro-technology and agro-industry. The general subjects are designed to provide students with general knowledge. An example of these subject is citizenship. Whereas, the basic subject contain science

and knowledge, i.e. supporting technological and industrial skills for the students.

English subject in the curriculum belongs to the general subjects. Then, English skill is given to support students' skill in technological and industrial fields. In other words, English is not primary subject in the curriculum. The subject is aimed at developing students' language skill in order to be able to cope with the progress of technology and industry. In fact, polytechnic graduates still lack ability to communicate in English either in spoken or written form related to both general English – daily language - and agro-technology and agro-industry. They presumably need more teaching-learning activities to enhance their ability in English. They should be given more time to learn English in class. By exposing students to a large quantity of English teaching-learning activities, they will expectedly possess good English skill: communicating English in spoken and written forms both in English for daily use

and for specific purpose – at work. Considering such reason, State Polytechnic of Lampung has issued a policy to improve students' English ability by administering extended English class.

Extended English Class is a term used by the researcher to refer to the policy of modified English curriculum applied at State Polytechnic of Lampung. In the previous curriculum, 2 credits are allocated for English class, while in Extended English Class the time is extended, to be 10 credits in three years, 2 credits each semester for 5 semesters. Two credits of English class consist of 270 minutes. By this policy students are expected to be highly competent in English both for daily communication purpose and following technological progress.

This policy rises questions on whether the program would result in a good impact on the students' linguistic competence, and whether the policy meets students' needs and expectancy, whether students' parents and people view

it positively, whether the program suits to the labor market demand, and some others. A research on this matter, therefore, has been conducted to find the answers for the questions above since there has not been a research on it before. In this case, the writer conducted a research to find out an answer of the question from students' point of view, i.e. whether the program meets their needs and expectancy, whether they want to study general English, and whether they prefer studying English for Specific Purpose since they go to the school for the sake of learning agro-technological and agro-industrial science. In other words, this research attempted to scrutinize and describe any factors related to and influencing the program. This research focused on finding clear description of the students' responses on whether the program is worth-doing, whether they know the importance of English role for their future career, whether they undertake successful English learning, whether they expect to be highly competent in English and need more English teaching-

learning activities, whether they eager to learn English for Agriculture or general English, and whether the English program should be extended and continued.

For that purpose, the researcher used qualitative research design in form of case study. By this method, the researcher will solely illustrate psychological phenomena of the subjects, and merely interpreted the phenomena by using subjects' point of view. So, the researcher avoided to interpret the phenomena by referring to his own point of view and not to try to interpret the phenomena by using a particular angle out of context of subjects' view.

Method

Questionnaires were administered to collect the data. The questionnaires are distributed to the students and the results are put into numerical data. The data were then classified based upon percentage basis. Then they were elaborated and narrated in detail. The information is then enriched through interview. This technique is used to elicit clearer and deeper information from

the subjects by referring to the answers on the questionnaire. Data were taken randomly in June 2006 on State Polytechnic of Lampung. Twenty percent of the whole 275 students, i.e. 55 students as subjects from all the departments as the source of the data by a systematic interval numbers.

Reliability of the Questionnaires

The questionnaires used to obtain the data in this research will be tried out to students other than the subjects before they are administered to the subjects on purpose of eliciting their reliability. The questionnaires are distributed to the students and the results are put into numerical data. The data are then analyzed to know the reliability coefficient of the questionnaires. To measure the reliability of the questionnaires of this research SPSS Cronbach's Alpha program is applied.

The questionnaires was divided into three categories; questionnaires on the students' perception toward English, questionnaires on the students' perception toward Extended English Class, and

questionnaires on the students' perception toward English materials. The reliability of the questionnaires are 0.80, 0.94, and 0.77 respectively.

Result And Discussion

Perception toward English

On the matter of vocabulary, students evaluated English negatively as its vocabulary contains some difficulties compared to their first language: number of vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation. 69.1% students agreed on the fact that English is a language with a rich vocabulary and they found it difficult to learn the vocabulary because its spelling pronounces differently in different words. In addition, 61.8% students considered it was also difficult to learn the pronunciation of the vocabulary. If the vocabulary is found difficult to study by the students, it will arouse negative feelings. The negative feelings will automatically generate negative assesmet and subsequently evokes negative perception. Thus, they tend to

avoid English. Reluctance and barrier seem coming up and preventing them to learn the language.

Dealing with the grammar, however, the students evaluated this component of English positively. In addition, they even, in general, perceived that English is not very difficult language to learn. This positive overview would spontaneously balance the negative perception toward the vocabulary. Hence, if negative perception encourages students to avoid English, the positive view will drive the students in ways to approach the language.

As a matter of facts, on the dimension of like-dislike items, the students

were prone to reply positively, i.e. besides agreeing that English is not a very difficult language, the students also commented that they liked English. The favorable attitude on English gave a good atmosphere and benefited students to learn the language more successfully. It is drawn from the theory stating that people tend to see and to do anything that pleases them (Atkinson,et.al.,1997).

To sum up, the students perceived English both negatively and positively. More students, however, perceived English neither positively nor negatively. In other words, they expressed neutral perception (Diagram 1).

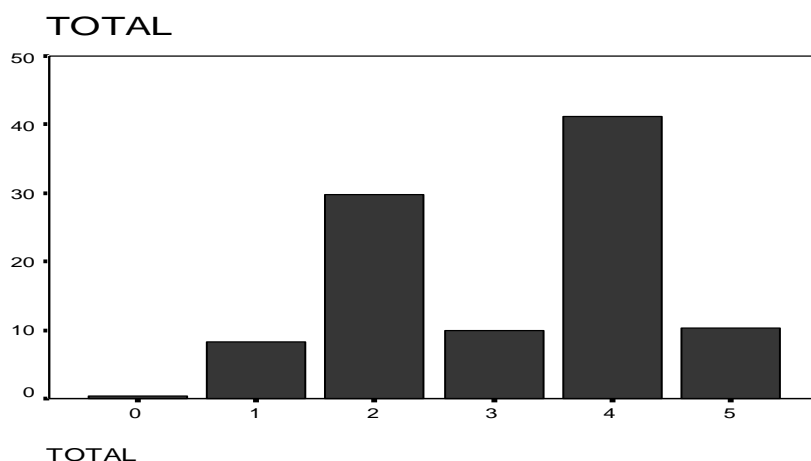


Diagram 1. Students' responses toward English as a language. More students perceived English positively

Perception toward Extended English Class

When dealing with English learning experiences, two groups of same number of students raised different responses. One group stated they failed to master English even though they had been learning English since they were in junior high school, whereas the other group expressed the reversed response. These two opposite groups of students raised some reasons for their success or failure to master English. Teacher, among others, was the most dominant factor in their English learning process. Those who were successful flattered their teacher and those who were unsuccessful stated that their teacher had a role for their failure. In this case, no one thought it was time allocation making him incapable to master the language.

Past experiences in learning English the students have ever undergone greatly influenced the way they assessed the extended English class. In this case, the same number of students have undergone opposite experiences. Half of them had poor experience in learning English while the other half had the reversed one. Then, those who experienced badly, according to the

theory (Satiadarma, 2001), tended to assess the extended English class negatively and would pessimistically accept the program, as they were not sure to be successful. Whereas the rest would behave differently, they would be convinced to be more successful in learning English and would likely welcome the program positively.

The students' response toward the impact of extended English class on their language competence gives a bit clearer information. Although half of the students experienced poorly in learning English, more than half of the students accepted the fact that extended English class improved their English competence. Their belief in the betterment of their English competence after having more time to learn English at school would raise their confidence to master the language and would certainly encourage them to accept the program.

Furthermore, they firmly believe that they could master English in the absence of talent and at the same time in the presence of great time and opportunity.

It appeared to be a plausible argument for the success of the language mastery -- great time of learning would enable students to master the language. This firm belief directs and helps them to be more capable (Satiadarma, 2001) to master the language rather than belief that language mastery requires gift. The expectation that they would be successful drives them to arrange creative steps to fulfill their hope. Then this would affect their mind in response to the extended English class, i.e. when they expected to learn English and they believed they could master it, they might have a good perception toward extended English class provided they did not have any other reasons to refuse.

The students had expected that they certainly could learn English so that they, totaled 56.4%, accepted the program of extending English class. It is because they saw the extended time gave them more opportunity to learn the language and therefore improved their competence. This fact is of course not excluding the fact that

half of them had bad experience in learning English, which might have discouraged them to learn the language. In conclusion, the students positively assessed the things discussed above so that they accepted the program.

The students, based on item 8, were interested in and motivated to learn English. Theory says motivation arouses, directs, and maintains someone's behavior. It can be either toward or away from something, say, it drives someone to do or not to do something and thus drives someone to initiate action. In contrast, the absence of motivation usually diminishes a person to a state of listlessness and idleness (Hamacheck, 1995). When the students are motivated to do something, they will perceive the thing positively. The students, in this case, were motivated to learn English so they would perceive extended English class as a good thing to make. This argument adds more lists of positive perception of the extended English class attributes.

The students saw and interpreted the items of questionnaire differently. In the initial paragraphs of this discussion, they stated that they did not object and even accepted the program of extending English class. While in response to item number 15, they expected to have not more than 4 hours a week. In interpreting the item, students' need in schooling apparently played a very important role. This psychological factor made a picture of perception in their mind. The students saw the program in relevance with what they expected to get in their study in vocational school. People, theory says (Darley, Glucksberg, and Kinchla in Woolfolk, 1995), tend to see anything that they expect will help fulfill their needs and neglect anything that does not meet their needs. The students rejected the program inasmuch as the program set aside the vocational subjects that they actually went to vocational school for. The program was applied by reducing the time allocation for the vocational subjects. It is obviously a plausible reason for the denial of the

program. This paragraph tells clearly that the students' need of schooling drives their perception toward extended English class. They needed to study vocational subjects in the school more than other subjects. Even so, they generally accepted the program as long as it does not confiscate the time allocation for vocational subjects.

As a perception object, to conclude, English and the extended English class involve several attributes like vocabulary, grammar, time allocation, etc. As aforementioned, perception toward English and the extended English class is a function of how students evaluate these different attributes. If more attributes are evaluated positively than negatively, a positive perception results. In this discussion, more attributes were actually assessed positively by the students that automatically positive perception should have resulted. They indeed perceived the English positively and welcomed the program of extending English subject time allocation (Diagram 2).

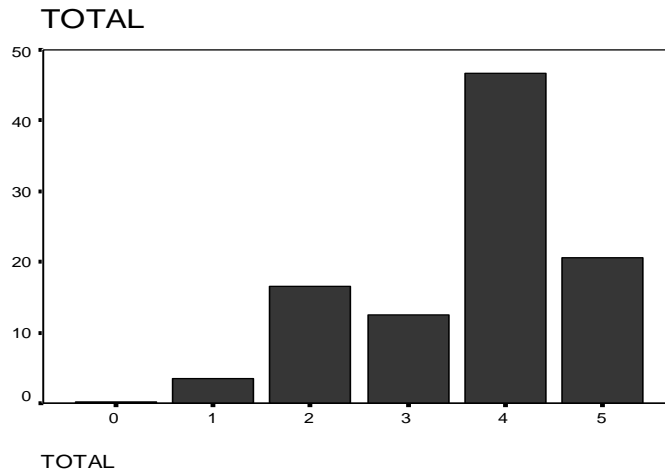


Diagram 2. Students' responses toward Extended English Class. More students perceived the Extended English Class positively

Students' Perception toward English Material

Concerning the materials that should be covered in the English program, many students (65.4%) despite going to vocational school which specializes on specific applied skills-- technology and industry—said that they did not only want to learn English for Specific Purpose, i.e. English that is specially designed in accordance with the major subjects they were learning, but also wanted to learn general English. Meanwhile, few others (25.5%) proposed an idea that the materials given to them should be related to their field of study.

Nevertheless, general English needs to be included in the English program made for polytechnic, not only English for specific purpose (Diagram 3).

However, it is expected that the English programs contain materials for technology and industry support the students' capability in the field of technology and industry. General English ought to be merely a complementary material in that the students will use the language more in industrial setting rather than in daily life setting.

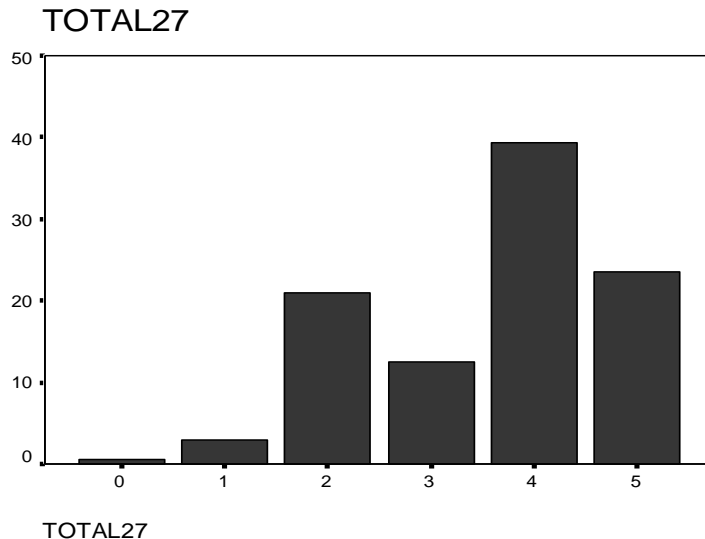


Diagram 3. Students perception toward the English material. More students reacted positively to the inclusion of general English in the English curriculum for vocational higher school.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Most of the students had poor experience on English learning in high school while the other had the reversed one. Both the students' experiences resulted from teachers' role, the time allocation, and teaching-learning activity. Therefore, besides extending the time allocation, school stakeholders had better focus more on improvement of the teachers' quality and teaching-learning process. The students also agreed that two hour-instruction a week is not enough to learn English and it is necessarily extended. In addition, The materials of

English given are not necessarily related to their field of study. Meaning that general English is needed since they are basically low in this. English for Specific Purpose should, however, be included in the instruction even though general English may be the focus in the instruction now that the students will use the language more in their daily life and the workplace setting.

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