

Teaching English Using Poetry: An Alternative to Implement Contextual Teaching and Learning

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This paper describes poetry as an alternative to implement Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL). CTL places learning and learning activities in a real-life context, incorporating not only what is learned but also why students should learn it. Meanwhile, poetry is chosen for its authenticity, in which, all nations have their own record on poetry. The classroom activities which involve poetry are poetry production (writing), poetry performance (reading), and poetry appreciation (speaking). By using poetry, learning processes are expected to meet the seven main components of effective learning: constructivism, questioning, inquiry, learning community, modeling, and authentic assessment. Moreover, the learning process can develop not only language skills but also critical thinking skill.

Keywords: Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), poetry, components of ideal teaching and learning

Artikel ini memaparkan puisi sebagai alternatif penerapan pengajaran dan pembelajaran berbasis konteks (CTL). CTL menempatkan belajar dan aktifitas pembelajaran dalam konteks nyata, memasukan tidak hanya apa yang dipelajari tetapi juga apa yang siswa harus pelajari. Sementara itu, puisi dipilih karena alasan otentisitas dimana setiap negara memiliki puisi. Aktifitas kelas yang melibatkan puisi meliputi menulis puisi, membaca puisi, dan berdiskusi tentang puisi. Ini diharapkan mampu memenuhi tujuh komponen pembelajaran yang efektif: konstruktivisme, inquiri, komunitas pembelajaran, modeling, dan penilaian otentik. Proses pembelajaran tersebut tidak hanya meningkatkan keterampilan berbahasa tetapi juga berpikir kritis.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning is a social process that cannot be conducted without personal interaction. According to Suciati and Irawan (2005), in a learning process, students will relate mutually, both with teachers and with other students, to build knowledge and understanding. In an ideal learning process, all students are involved to recognize and explore their potential and build knowledge. The main task of a teacher is to facilitate students in absorbing materials and developing self potential. To fulfill this task, the teacher must be able to create not only an attractive and harmonious learning environment but also a memorable teaching. This means that teachers need to create an atmosphere of learning that can stimulate the interest of students to the learning materials (Faridah, 2012).

Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) is a learning concept that can help teachers to link the learning materials with the real world context. CTL approach encourages students to make connections between their knowledge and application in their lives as family members and society. The task of the teacher is to manage the class as a team working together to find something new. This something new (knowledge) is acquired from discovering, not solely depending on the teacher.

Some studies have shown the positive effects of CTL. Hafidz (2010) reports that CTL creates a meaningful learning atmosphere. In this case, students can relate what is learned in the classroom with their knowledge of their world. In other words, CTL places learning and learning activities in a real-life context, incorporating not only what is learned but also why they should learn it. Annisa (2015) reports that the use of CTL receives a positive response from students, in addition to improving their speaking skills. Another study conducted by Wulandari (2016) finds that the implementation of CTL enhances students' creativity in learning and improves students speaking skill.

This paper explains poetry as one of the proper media to implement CTL. Besides the advantages CTL provides, this writing is motivated by some doubt in the possibilities of using poetry in English teaching. In some sorts, the teacher still holds that poetry is still characterized as deviating from or distorting the norm of Standard English language and it is very difficult (Panaveli, 2011). In addition, poetry has not been considered as a proper material for English language teaching, so it has been left outside the EFL classroom. Very often teachers consider poetry as one of the most sophisticated literary genres and hence too difficult for EFL Learners to grasp (Aladini, Farahbod & Arjomandi, 2015).

POETRY IN EFL

Poetry is a universal phenomenon throughout human civilization. Almost all nations have a history of poetry; from its simplest form, in the form of mantras and praises, to the most modern form. Poetry is recorded as part of the history of civilization of every nation. (Siswantoro,

2002). Some people read poetry for fun and entertainment, while others read poetry for reflection.

Some studies have been conducted to incorporate literature in English teaching. In broad discussion, Hismanoglu (2005) points out that literature plays an important role in the English program of many non-English speaking countries. However, there are some problems encountered by language teachers within the area of teaching English through literature. First, there are few pedagogically designed materials that can be used by language teachers. Second, there is lack of preparation in the area of literature teaching in EFL. Third, there is the absence of clear cut objectives defining the role of literature in EFL. Cubukcu (2010) believes that poetry can stimulate students' critical thinking. Students will be creative to construct and express their ideas, and it gives teacher a new way to listen. Mittal (2014) explains that poetry offers many opportunities for language teaching and practice. It gives wide chance of learning vocabulary and structure. There are basic uses poetry can bring into effective English teaching. It brings emotions, rhyme, and congenial expression in classroom.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The suggested activities using poetry as a medium to implement CTL in English learning are poetry production (writing), poetry performance (reading), and poetry appreciation (discussion). It should be noted that in this discussion poetry is mainly used as the medium of English teaching. Therefore, teachers are not required to provide theories about poetry production and analysis comprehensively. Thus, some poetic devices such as figure of speech, rhymes, and rhythms will not be focused in the learning process although there is a possibility in that direction.

Poetry Production (Writing)

Poetry writing is an activity that aims to direct students to write their own poems independently. All students are asked and encouraged to write poetry. The teacher gives students freedom in the process of writing poetry. This writing activity can be done inside or outside the classroom.

Students are asked to look for an object as a source of inspiration for writing poetry. In this stage, students are directed to be critical and responsive to living or non-living things around them. Students are also directed to use dictionary or ask other students to find the words and expressions they need to produce a poem.

Through this activity, students get new vocabularies and opportunities to socialize and communicate with others. The teacher gives students understanding that they should keep and share new words to other students in the discussion session. Before the students do the process of writing poetry, the teacher gives some examples of poetry to the students to give an idea of the forms of poetry. Then the teacher invite the students to choose the preferred topic to be described in the poem. To make it easier for the students to write poetry, the teacher should explain that

making simple poems is not difficult. It describes a personal response. They just have to be environmentally sensitive. The environment can be a source of inspiration in making poetry.

In this stage, the teacher should eliminate students' negative attitudes toward poetry. It should be pointed out that to produce a poem does not always have to contemplate and search for philosophical charges. Poetry can also contain descriptions and our opinions about an object. Therefore, students can choose the topic of poetry based on their environment and interests. So, they do not have to take long time for reflection. Teachers can also provide some examples of poems that are tailored to the students' level of proficiency. For the beginner stage, a very simple example of poem can be taken as an example. For higher level students, examples of more 'filled' poems are required or they are required to write more than one poem.

As mentioned, students should be given understanding that they can make a poem based on their surroundings. For example, while at home, they can make a poem about mother, father, pets, food, bathroom, bedroom, or brother. When in outdoors, they can make poems about plants, people, cars, or parks. Sample is very important to give an idea to students that making poetry can be done by observation. The results of the observations are then written in the form of description. The description needs to be written in a limited number of words. For more advanced learners, the teacher can ask the students to write a poem based on the news in newspapers or television. In addition, to give more challenging task, the teacher can ask them to take songs, films, or books as their inspirations. The poem can be the students' responses to songs, film, or books.

For alternative instructional activities, the teachers can invite students to think or observe an event or object (living or non-living) around them or those they know. The teacher directs students to defer their observations in the form of verses. In writing their descriptions, students are encouraged to search for the words they need by searching them in the dictionary or asking other students. The activity could promote students' criticality and response to environment. Learning activity can be done individually or in group.

Poetry Performance (Reading)

Students are asked to read the poem they produced before their friends. Poetry reading can be done inside or outside the classroom. Before reading the poem, students are encouraged to use their verbal and non-verbal language in communicating the content of their poems. They are allowed to use movements, body language, and facial expressions to convey information within their poems. After reading the poem, students will be invited to give other students an opportunity to ask questions or responses to the poem they have read. This activity is expected to train students' pronunciation, verbal and non-verbal ways in communication, creativity and innovation, and responses to questions.

Poetry Appreciation (Speaking)

This activity is done after the poetry reading activity. Students are asked to prepare responses or questions related to the poetry that has been read. This activity can be done both outside and

inside the classroom. Students can use dictionaries and ask other students about a vocabulary needed to respond or question. Thus, students can enrich their vocabulary in this session. Apart for speaking skill, this activity can train students to ask and respond to questions, and it can enhance their listening skills.

COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE LEARNING ACHIEVED BY INCORPORATING POETRY IN ELT

The following points describe how the use of poetry in English learning can cover seven main components of CTL which cover constructivism, inquiry, questioning, learning community, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment (Johnson, 2012).

Constructivism

Constructivism is the cornerstone of the CTL approach, in which knowledge is built by humans little by little. Knowledge is not a set of facts, concepts, or rules that are ready to be taken and remembered. Man must construct that knowledge and give meaning through real experience. Therefore, learning must be packed into the process of constructing not receiving knowledge.

In the process of writing poetry, students gain firsthand experience. They not only see examples and theories about writing poetry. On the other hand, during poetry reading activities, students are free to express their ideas verbally and non-verbally. In the speaking session, each student is allowed to leave a comment or question on a poem which has been recited. Through these three processes, students' knowledge is expected to be constructed.

Inquiry

Inquiry is one of the points in a contextual approach. The knowledge and skills acquired by students are not given but found. That is why teachers need to be innovative in designing activities that can lead students to the activities of inquiry. In the process of learning English using poetry, students take several steps reflecting inquiry. First, students make the formulation. They formulate the purpose of the poem they want to write. Second, they make an observation of the object. Third, they choose words. Finally, students read poems to other students. In other words, in the learning process, the use of poetry in learning English makes students perform activities categorizing as inquiry.

Questioning

Knowledge usually starts from questioning. Learning English using poetry can lead students to ask questions. Teachers can also be involved in this questioning activity. They can ask to generate responses and curiosity of students. By asking, the teacher can know the level of student understanding. In addition, by asking questions, teachers can generate more questions from students. This questioning activity can be applied between students and students, students with teachers, or students with people who are brought in (involved) in the learning

process. Questioning activity is also done when students discuss, work in groups, or observe an object.

Learning Community

The concept of community learning can mean that the results of learning are obtained from cooperation among students. In a classroom with contextual approach, teachers are advised to carry out learning processes in groups, and students need to be divided into heterogeneous groups. In this interaction, the clever are expected to teach the weak. With regard to the use of poetry in a contextual approach, poetry writing, reading, and speaking activities can be done in groups. This is intended to give more freedom to students in the learning processes. Ideally, the number of group members should not be more than four. Limiting the number of group members can minimize out-of-topic discussion.

Modeling

The next component of contextual approach is modeling. A teacher can provide examples of poetic forms that are tailored to the ability of the students. For beginner-level students, teachers can give the example of a simple poem like below:

My Lunch

A candy bar
A piece of cake
A lollipop
A chocolate shake
Some bubblegum
And soda pop
Vanilla wafers
Cherry punch
My mom slept in
While I made lunch
--Kenn Nesbitt

The poem is the example of simple form of poetry. Giving a simple example is important to make students realize that making a poem is not difficult. In addition to provide examples of forms of poetry, teachers can also provide other examples. Teacher can give an example of pronunciation for poetry reading activities. Teacher can give examples of how to recite and read a poem. Teacher can take benefit from YouTube, encyclopedias, or internet-based sources. Modeling activities are carried out before the students do the writing, reading, and speaking activities.

Reflection

Reflection is an important part of learning contextual approach. Reflection is a way of thinking about what was just learned or thinking back about what has been done in the past. The student deposits what he or she has just learned as a new knowledge, which is an enrichment or revision of prior knowledge. Reflection is a response to a newly received event, activity, or knowledge. In relation to poetry as a learning medium, before the learning session ends, students are invited to give their impressions after completing the learning process. Students are also expected to share their learning experiences with other students. Sharing experiences can be in the form of sharing new vocabulary or ideas. In addition, students can also collect or display their works on the class wall.

Authentic Assessment

Assessment is the process of collecting a variety of data that can provide a snapshot of students' learning progress. The descriptions of students' progress or development are important to assess. It will be the mirror of learning qualities. It is also done in order to ensure that students experience the learning process as it is desired. If the data collected by the teacher identifies that the student is not progressing in learning, the teacher can immediately take appropriate action.

In CTL, the progress of learning is judged by the process, not the end result. The end result of learning English using poetry is not the poetry itself used as benchmark in the assessment process. Assessment is done simultaneously and integrated. Teachers will conduct assessments in each stage. Therefore, students' score will be the accumulative score of their poetry production, poetry reading, and poetry discussion activities as well as teacher observation of students' activities during the whole class meeting.

CONCLUSIONS

So far, many classrooms still focus on teachers as the main source of knowledge. Through the foundation of constructivism, a contextual view is considered to be an alternative to a new learning strategy. In this regard, poetry can be one of the alternative medium of learning English that apply contextual approach. Learning English using poetry can cover the seven main components of contextual learning approach. The points above can be an alternative medium of learning using a contextual approach. Finally, the learning activities can help students improve their speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills as well as developing their critical thinking as literature can be used as a vehicle to promote students' critical thinking (Ilyas, 2016)

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