
The effectiveness of English as a general course program in Yogyakarta State University

Jamilah

Yogyakarta State University
e-mail: Jamilah3163@gmail.com

Abstract: *This study was aimed at finding out the effectiveness of English as a general course program in Yogyakarta State University using a survey technique. The population covered students, teachers, and program managers. Respondents from students were selected by the cluster random sampling technique while respondents from teachers and program managers were purposively selected. Data were collected using questionnaires, interview guides, and documents, and were descriptively analyzed. Findings showed that English as a general course program in Yogyakarta State University was ineffective since there were a lack of management support and teacher's support, no coordination among the parties involved, no sound curriculum to guide the teachers in implementing the program, a lack of teaching staff development, and low work satisfaction among the teachers and students.*

Keywords: *program effectiveness, English as a general course program, work satisfaction*

1. Introduction

Globalization has put English in a very strategic position as a global or international language. English is used as a means of communication in various fields such as in politics, diplomacy, industry, trade, science, technology, education, media, information technology, and popular cultures (Crystal, 1987; Huda, 2000; Jenkin, 2003; and Lauder; 2008) and as a consequence everyone is required to master it in order to be able to function effectively as a global citizen. English competence is one of the requirements for people to participate in this global era. In the context of higher education

in Indonesia, one of the quality indicators of good universities is the English competence of their graduates.

To facilitate their students to achieve this competence, universities in Indonesia offer English as a compulsory subject and it is commonly called *Bahasa Inggris MKU (Mata Kuliah Umum)* or English as a general course program. Despite its crucial function to facilitate the students to achieve this competence, this course program, so far, has not been given enough attention and it is considered as a minor subject. Many people say that the course is not effective to facilitate students to reach the desired competence.

The effectiveness of a language program can be seen from many aspects. Richards (2001: 198) states that teaching program effectiveness can be seen from four factors that can create condition to result in quality teaching. They are institutional, teacher, student, and teaching factors. The quality indicators of an institutional factor include eight points: (a) There are clearly stated educational goals; (b) There is a well-planned, balanced, and organized program that meets the needs of its students; (c) Systematic and identifiable processes exist for determining educational needs in the school and placing them in order of priority; (d) There is a commitment to learning, and an expectation that students will do well; (e) There is a high degree of staff involvement in developing goals and making decisions; (f) There is a motivated and cohesive teaching force with good team spirit; (g) Administrators are concerned with the teachers' professional development and are able to make the best use of their skills and experience; and (h) The school's programs are regularly reviewed and progress toward their goals is evaluated (Richards, 2001: 201). He further adds that a good educational institution should have clear vision, mission, strategic plans to reach its institutional goals, clear quality assurance mechanism, appropriate curriculum, flexible structural organization, smooth internal communication, develop its staff's professionalism, provide its staff with enough opportunity to develop their potentials, and provide conducive learning atmosphere (Richards, 2001: 202-207).

The second factor, teachers, is the most crucial one. Teachers are the ones that ultimately determine the success of a program. Good teachers can often compensate for the lack of good curriculum, proper materials, and learning resources for their teaching (Richards, 2001: 209).

Teachers can function well in their role if they get enough support from the institution. They should be well selected based on their skills and qualification and then given opportunities to develop their potentials to reach qualified teaching practice.

The third factor is teaching process. The quality of a teaching process can be seen from the way teachers plan the lessons and teach. A good teaching process follows certain principles reflected in the teaching methods, activities, materials, strategies, techniques and assessment employed. Quality teaching cannot simply be assumed to happen. It needs much effort from the teachers and should be facilitated by the institution (Richards, 2001: 217-218).

Li (2012) identifies nine principles of effective language teaching. They are (a) implementing challenging curriculum with high expectation, (b) designing standard academic content and making it more accessible, (c) offering explicit and culturally relevant instruction, (d) supporting metacognitive strategies and specific learning strategies, (e) using ELLs' first language strategically with difficult concepts, (f) teaching vocabulary within multiple contexts, (g) building reading comprehension ability, (h) providing strong oral and written language models for students to follow, and (i) integrating reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills.

The last factor is the learners in the learning process. Learning is not the mirror image of teaching. The extent to which teaching achieves its goals will also be dependent on how successfully learners have been considered in the planning and delivery process. The factors that affect a course successfully received by students are students' understanding of the course, their views of learning, learning styles, and motivation (Richards, 2001: 223-224).

Yogyakarta State University (YSU) is a state university of Indonesia that is based in Yogyakarta. It is trying to improve its quality to reach a world class university. To reach this ambition, a good English training program is essential to facilitate its students, its academic and also administrative staff to participate successfully in its world-class programs. English as a general course program is compulsory for all students of any study programs. Has this program run well and able to help the students improve their English competence? This study aimed at finding out how English as a general course program was implemented in this institution and how effective it had been so far.

2. Method

This study was a survey applying several techniques including observation, interview, distributing questionnaires, and document study. The respondents included students of YSU, the English teachers and the managers of all levels. The student sample was taken randomly, while the teachers and managers samples were purposively taken. There were two kinds of questionnaire; one was for the students and the other was for the teachers. Interview guidelines were used to interview the managers. The instruments were developed based on Richards's theory. The data were collected from July to October 2014 and were descriptively analyzed.

3. Findings and Discussion

The research findings are grouped into four sub headings: the general picture of the program implementation, institutional support to run the program effectively, teachers' views towards the program, and students' satisfaction towards the program. In the general picture of the program

implementation, according to the 2013 Curriculum, English as a general course program (MKU6211) is offered to all students of all study programs. There are 7 schools or faculties in YSU consisting of 65 study programs. Some 25 study programs offer it in the first semester, 24 study programs offer it in the second semester, 2 study programs in the third semester, 10 in the fourth semester, 3 in the fifth, and 1 study program offer it in the sixth semester. Most study programs (75%) put the course in the first year, either in the first or second semester, but the other 25% of the study programs put it in higher semesters.

From the data, it appears that not every study program has the same view to the nature of this course. Even some study programs name the course differently despite the course code that remains the same. For example, Accounting Education Study program names the course Bahasa Inggris TOEFL, Accounting D3 names it *Bahasa Inggris Bisnis* (Business English).

The course names may imply the focus they want to learn. Some study programs want to focus on TOEFL test practice, and some others may want to focus on Business English. The semester they choose to offer the course may also imply something. Those study programs that offer it in first and second semester consider it as the basic course, a course that is needed by students to prepare them to learn further in the university, but those that offer it in the fifth or sixth semester may consider it as a subject that prepares students for their job. From here, it seems that there are different views among the managers of the study programs towards the English Course (MKU6211).

To run the general course programs, YSU set up a center called UPT MKU or Technical Centre for General Course Programs. There are many divisions in this center, such as the

division for the English Course, for Pancasila Education, for Religion Education, etc. Each division is headed by a coordinator that is taken from the departments or schools where the related teachers are mostly taken from. For example, the coordinator for the English course is taken from the English education department, whether the secretary or the head of the department. This coordinator is in charge of assigning English teachers from this department to teach English in certain study programs that need them. Some study programs in YSU need English teachers from The English Education Department to teach English in their study programs, but some others have their own staff to do it.

Some study programs do not take the English teachers from the English Education Department. They use their own teachers to teach English. Hence, the English course in certain study programs in YSU is taught by the content teachers. Among study programs assigning content teacher to teach English are those in the School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, those in the School of Social Sciences, some in School of Engineering, and the Accounting study program in the School of Economics. On the other hand, the study programs that constantly take the English teachers from the English Education Department are those from the School of Education, those from the School of Sport, some from the School of Languages and Arts, and some from the School of Economics. From this data it is seen that there are two types of instructors for English Course (MKU6211) in YSU, the English teachers and the content teachers.

The different way of fulfilling the English course job may raise different views among the teachers assigned. Those from the English Education Department felt something inconsistent. They were assigned

by the English department head but they did not report to him/her. Instead, they had to report to the school where they taught. This fact raised some confusion among the teachers.

Upon receiving the job from the English Department head, the English teachers have to decide by themselves what to teach and how to teach it. There is no certain curriculum, no guideline or syllabus to follow. On the other side, they know much about language teaching methodology, they know that there are many choices of what to teach and how to teach it, there are many sources available for teaching English. There are so many things to consider and since there is no certain guideline to follow, the teachers feel uncertain with their work, feel unable to help the students in improving their English ability much, and therefore they are not so satisfied with their job.

On the other hand, teachers from related study programs, or the content teachers teaching English, view the job differently. They are assigned to teach English by their own heads and report to them as well. They can discuss what to teach and how to teach it in the study program. They can even decide on their own what to focus on depending on their view of the course.

This results in lighter consequences among the teachers and tends to make them satisfied with their job. They do not know much of language teaching methodology, so there is not much to consider. As long as they have given the materials related to their study program and made the students busy in the learning process, for them it is enough. When asked how the course ran, students said that they were given some journal articles related to their subject and were asked to translate and understand them and then present them in front of the class.

There was no guidance or teaching as to how to understand the journal articles. They had to work on their own.

In term of the institutional supports, the instructional system can include the availability of strategic plans (vision, mission, and clear goals) of the program, sound organization structure, appropriate curriculum, clear guide-lines to the program implementation, and clear monitoring system (Richards, 2001: 202). According to the managers at the top level, the institution has provided all the supports needed to run the program effectively. The center for general courses has been set up, coordinators for the courses have been appointed, meetings for teacher coordination have been facilitated, projects to develop course syllabus, learning materials and even course books have been offered. They feel they have done many things to support the general course programs to run effectively. However, teachers expressed different opinions related to that. They stated that what the institution had done was not enough to help them do their job as effectively as possible. Table 1 shows the teachers' opinions related to the institutional supports.

Based on Table 1, YSU has not provided enough supports needed to run the program effectively. There is no clear strategic plan to the course program, no curriculum, no

guidelines to the program implementation, and a lack of coordination and monitoring to the program implementation. The lack of teacher coordination leads the teachers to work on their own. Most of them (86%) stated that they made their own syllabus, and only 14% stated that they made it together with their colleagues. They also stated that they tried to find their own teaching materials, developed their own teaching program, and implemented it in their own styles, without being monitored whether it was effective or not. This is due to the fact that they got the teaching task from their department head, yet they had to report to another, that was the head of the school/faculty where they taught.

The fact that the teachers work in isolation is in contrary to the theory stating that to be effective, teachers should have the opportunities to benefit from the collective expertise of their colleagues, and this can be done when teachers work together in pairs or in groups on course planning, materials development, and lesson planning. During the process of planning, potential problems can often be identified and resolved (Richards 2001: 219).

Another support from the institution to run the course effectively is the availability of needed facilities, such as suitable classrooms, teaching resources, internet access, help lines, orientation, and teacher

Table 1
Institutional Supports to Run English as a General Course Program

Indicators	Available	Not Available	Do Not Know
Clear strategic plan	0	14 (100%)	0
Sound curriculum		14 (100%)	
Clear guidelines to the program implementation		14 (100%)	
Teacher coordination	2 (14%)	10 (72%)	2 (14%)
Monitoring to the Program implementation	2 (14%)	10 (72%)	2 (14%)

training (Richards, 2001: 212-214). Related to teacher trainings, only 21% of the teachers surveyed stated that they got training on how to teach English for general course program, while the other 79% stated that they had never got the intended training. Related to the facilities available, all teachers surveyed stated that facilities needed for their job had not met their expectation. The classrooms available were generally not suitable for the teaching-learning process of English. There was an LCD projector but no speaker set available, or, the room was so small while the number of students was so large. Further, the internet access was not always available and could not be used for the teaching and learning process.

Despite the fact that available facilities do not support them well, most teachers surveyed (76%) stated that they had used information technology (IT) in their teaching, while 24% had not used it. Among those who had made use of IT stated that IT was very advantageous for teaching and learning of English but they did not use it maximally due to the limited access and bandwidth of the internet available.

The lack of institutional support leads to low work satisfaction among teachers. Related to this, 72% of the teachers surveyed stated that they were not satisfied with their work, 14% stated that they felt a bit satisfied, and only 14% stated that they were satisfied. Those who were satisfied stated the reasons, that the job was a kind of entertainment, a chance to meet different students, and an opportunity to improve their knowledge and experience. Those who were unsatisfied stated the reasons, that they could not teach as good as possible, so that they were not able to help students improve their English ability much. Some others stated that it was because the program was not clear enough

for them to where it should be brought, for there were no clear guidelines.

In term of the teachers' views towards the program, as mentioned previously, most teachers surveyed (72%) were not satisfied with their work and only 14% was satisfied. Their work satisfaction is much affected by the way they view their job. The following is a list of teachers' views on the job, teaching English as a general course program in various study programs, from the positive to the negative one. They stated that English as a general course program was: interesting, entertaining, improving knowledge and helping them get more friends, an opportunity to learn new things, improving knowledge, skills in teaching English for students from various study programs with various background knowledge, as a challenge to teach English better in various study programs, a job from the institution that should be done, and a course that is not so useful in improving students' English ability.

Further they stated various factors that made English as a general course program unable to run well. They are: there is no clear goals of the course program, there is no sound curriculum to follow, there is no clear guideline to the program implementation, the course book provided by institution is not suitable with their needs, there is no good coordination among teachers to the course implementation, there is not enough time to prepare the lesson due to the poor schedule arrangement, class size for English is too big, students' entry English ability is too heterogeneous, students' English learning motivation is very low, and facilities for effective English teaching and learning process are not available.

Despite their various opinions to the job of teaching English as a general course program and various conditions that hinder

their job, the teachers seem to have done the best they can to teach English in this university. Effective program implementation can be seen from students' satisfaction. Students seem quite satisfied with the program they have followed.

In relation to students' satisfaction at the English class as a general course program, students' satisfaction is seen from their evaluation on their teachers' teaching performances. Quality teaching is indicated by the ability of the teachers to communicate learning materials clearly, to prepare the lesson, to manage the time, to arouse students'

interest, to be responsive, and to perform the teaching as a whole. Beside teaching performance, the content of the program, the used module or teaching materials, fairness of the assessment, useful feedbacks also contribute to students' satisfaction (Richards, 2001). Likert-scale questionnaires were distributed to a group of students taught by a content teacher and another group of students taught by an English teacher. The data gained were descriptively analyzed and interpreted based on the Table 2.

Tables 3 and 4 show that both groups of students were quite satisfied with the course

Table 2
Suharto's Score Category

Scales	Interval of Mean Values	Categories
1	2.00-2.60	Very poor
2	2.61-3.21	Poor
3	3.22-3.82	Fair
4	3.83-4.43	Good
5	Above 4.44	Very Good

Tabel 3
English Teaching Performance of Content Teachers

No	Indicators	N	Min	Max	Means	Category
1	The ability to communicate Learning materials	54	3	5	3.93	Good
2	Teacher's preparation	54	2	5	3.91	Good
3	Time management	54	2	5	3.96	Good
4	Ability to arouse students interest	54	2	5	3.54	Fair
5	Responsive to students learning difficulties	54	1	5	3.45	Fair
6	The quality of teaching content	54	2	5	4.04	Good
7	Learning materials used	54	1	5	3.72	Fair
8	Assessment is fair	54	2	5	3.89	Good
9	Usefull feedback	54	2	5	3.81	Fair
10	Learning activities effective to improve language competence	54	2	5	3.67	Fair
11	Students satisfaction	54	1	5	3.41	Fair

Tabel 4

English Teaching Performance of English Teachers

No	Indicators	N	Min	Max	Means	Category
1	The ability to communicate Learning materials	37	3	5	3.92	Good
2	Teacher's preparation	37	3	5	4.11	Good
3	Time management	37	3	5	3.63	Fair
4	Ability to Arouse students interest	37	3	5	3.43	Fair
5	Responsive to students learning difficulties	37	2	5	3.59	Fair
6	The quality of Teaching content	37	3	5	3.78	Fair
7	Learning materials used	37	2	5	3.89	Good
8	Assessment is fair	37	2	5	3.73	Fair
9	Usefull feedback	37	3	5	4.03	Good
10	Learning activities effective to improve language competence	37	3	5	3.97	Good
11	Students satisfaction	37	3	5	3.65	Fair

they followed, with the mean score 3.41 for the content teacher and 3.65 for the English teacher and both are categorized as fair. Both teachers were rated good for indicators 1 and 2, the ability in communicating learning materials and in preparing the lessons. Besides indicators 1 and 2, the content teacher was rated good for indicators 3, 6, and 8 (time management, the quality of teaching content, and the fairness of assessment) while the English teacher was rated good for indicators 7, 9, and 10 (learning materials, useful feedbacks, learning activities). From these data it seems that content teachers and English teachers have their own strengths and weaknesses which are quite different from each other. Content teachers tend to be stronger in choosing the learning content, while the English teachers are better in designing learning materials and activities, and providing useful feedback.

To improve the teaching quality of English as a general course program, students propose some suggestions as follow:

teachers should prepare better materials, teachers should use better teaching media, use more creative teaching techniques, manage time better, add more credits to the program, add more teaching materials including grammar, tenses, vocabulary building, add more practice, choose input texts suitable to students' needs, add more process assessments.

4. Conclusion

Despite the efforts having been done by managers at the top level to give support to realise effective general course programs in YSU, stake holders still find English as a general course program ineffective due to some reasons. First there are still different views towards the program among the managers. Some view it as a basic course for preparing students to study further, some others view it as a TOEFL preparation to anticipate students' graduation requirement, while others view it as a job preparation.

Different kinds of teachers teaching English as a general course program leads to different approach to the English teaching in this university with their own strengths and weaknesses, although they lead to nearly the same level of students' satisfaction, which is in the fair category. However, teachers' satisfaction towards their work was very low. Teachers could perform better if only the institution gave more supports to the program implementation, such as providing clear guidelines to the program implementation, developing reasonable curriculum and syllabus, providing better coordination among teachers, monitoring the program implementation, and providing enough and suitable facilities.

References

- Crystal, D. (1987). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harris, J., & Duibhir, P.O. (2011). *Effective language teaching: A synthesis of research*. Dublin: Trinity College.
- Huda, N. (2000). Kedudukan dan fungsi bahasa asing. In Alwi, H., & Sugono, D. (eds) (2011). *Politik bahasa*. Jakarta: Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan.
- Jenkins, J. (2003). *World Englishes: A resource book for students*, *Routledge English language introductions series*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Lauder, A. (2008). "The status and function of English in Indonesia: A review of key factors". *MAKARA Sosial Humaniora*, 12(1), 9-20.
- Li, J. (2012). Principles of effective English language learner pedagogy, from www.collegeboard.org/research. Retrieved on March 13, 2015.
- McMullen, M.J. (2014). "The value and attributes of an effective preparatory English program: Perception of Saudi University students". *English Language Teaching*, 7(7), 131-140.
- Richards, J.C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Suharto, G. (2006). *Pengukuran dan penilaian hasil belajar Bahasa Inggris*. Yogyakarta: Pusat Pelayanan dan Pengembangan Bahasa.