

The 2nd Forum on Linguistics and Literature (FOLITER)

**Engaging Linguistics and Literature:
Perspectives and Insights beyond the
Curriculum**

Editors:

Rohmani Nur Indah & M. Edy Thoyib



English Letters and Language Department
Faculty of Humanities
Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University, Malang

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Editors:

Rohmani Nur Indah

M. Edy Thoyib

Designer:

Bayu Tara Wijaya

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email: naila.pustaka@gmail.com

in collaboration with

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Faculty of Humanities

Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University, Malang

PREFACE
HEAD OF THE ENGLISH LETTERS AND LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
UIN MAULANA MALIK IBRAHIM MALANG

Honorable the invited speakers, honorable presenters and participants of the second FOLITER Conference, distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen.

First of all, may I invite you to express the grateful feeling to Allah, the Almighty and the most Merciful, for his blessing that we are able to attend the second Forum on Linguistics and Literature 2015 administered by the English Letters and Language Department, Faculty of Humanities, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. It is indeed such a great pleasure for us to extend the warmest welcome and the sincerest greeting to all participants of this favorable occasion. We would also like to express our profound gratitude to the conference committee members in organizing the event with full commitment and incredible dedication.

This year's forum takes *Engaging Linguistics and Literature: Perspectives and Insights beyond the Curriculum* as its theme. Such an issue is widely discussed in the recent postmodern global world, where established concepts and grand theories of linguistics and literature are reinterpreted and, in turn, affects the curriculum design and evaluation in the area of English Language Teaching. This tendency may also trigger the progress of linguistics and literature paradigms, not just within the curriculum but also beyond. The conference thus seeks to address the issues on the perspectives and insights in the application of the concepts of linguistics and literature in relation to the curriculum development.

Our eagerness to hold the conference is one of the Department's concerns on the increasing interests and demands for the higher quality of ELT which takes current issues in linguistics and literature as its bases for innovation. This conference is, therefore, supposed to be a momentous academic forum which may raise significant endeavors to escalate the ELT advancement with regard to linguistics and literature approaches.

We hope that everyone will find the ideas presented in the forum inspiring and that the papers compiled in the proceeding enlightening for the engagement of linguistics and literature perspectives in the development of ELT curriculum. We wish great happiness and success to all parties supporting the forum.

Malang, 1 September 2015
Head,

Dr. Syamsudin, M.Hum.

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LANGUAGE TEACHING

Structured Academic Controversy to Trigger Student's Active Participation and Critical Thinking

Andi Susilo¹, Restu Mufanti²

English Department, STAIN Ponorogo¹

*English Department, UNMUH Ponorogo²
meutearochidta@yahoo.com*

Abstract

This paper is aimed at introducing and highlighting structured academic controversy as a model of cooperative learning technique to teach university students. It is instructional uses of intellectual conflict to facilitate students broaden and deepen understanding related to particular issue. This technique provides opportunities for students to participate actively in collaborative learning situations that encourage them have own ideas and conclusions challenged by advocates of an opposing position, develop a strong arguments in defining and interpreting the problem, developing and evaluating solutions, developing a plan based on a selected solution, and reflecting on the learning outcomes. Hence, the use of well-organized academic controversy can trigger students' critical thinking, increase the quality of problem solving, decision making, and reasoning, and promote higher achievement. For this reason, this article addresses some key issues on the application of this technique in EFL learning. This present article, first, highlights the nature of academic controversy and its potential educational benefits. Afterward, the structured academic controversy process is described. In what follows, it provides a model of EFL learning activity using structured academic controversy.

Keywords: academic controversy, intellectual conflict, cooperative learning, critical thinking

1. Introduction

Learning to think and talk critically is often regarded as a difficult aspect of language learning for teachers to help students with. Subsequently teachers encounter problems to engage students in such interaction where students actively use the target language to learn, discuss, share, argue or debate particular topic in particular cooperative context. To my own teaching practice, it is mostly the case that students mostly feel embarrassed to use the target language in discussion and get afraid to argue in debate class. Even they remind silent on almost the whole classes although various communicative techniques and participation grades have been applied.

To cope with the need of students' learning, structured academic controversy (Henceforth SAC) model can be applied as one of alternative

strategies. SAC is a discussion that helps the students to broaden and deepen understanding related to an issue, problem or topic. The use of well-organized SAC is asserted to trigger students' critical thinking, increase the quality of problem solving, decision making, and reasoning, and promote higher achievement (Johnson et al., 1996). Hence, this present paper is to introduce and explain SAC as a model of cooperative learning technique particularly to teach university students in EFL learning. Firstly, it highlights the nature of SAC and its potential educational benefits. Next, SAC process is presented and described comprehensibly. In what follows, it provides a model of EFL learning activity through SAC. All those issues are presented in the following sections respectively.

2. Discussion

2.1 Structured Academic Controversy Model: A Cooperative Way to Debate

Johnson et. al., (1996: 3) define SAC as the instructional use of intellectual conflict to promote higher achievement and increase the quality of problem solving, decision making, critical thinking, reasoning, interpersonal relationships, and psychological health and well being. It is a type of academic conflict that exists when one student's ideas, information, conclusions, theories, or opinions are incompatible with those of another and the two seek to reach an agreement (Johnson & Johnson, 1988). More operationally, the application of this technique involves a cooperative form of debate in which groups of four, divided into pairs, take turns representing two opposing views on an issue before attempting to reach a consensus on the issue (Jacobs, 2010).

The essential element of SAC procedures is that students work collaboratively to critically analyze each other's positions in an effort to identify the weaknesses and strengths of the opposing argument. They then make efforts to refute the opposing views while rebutting the attacks on their own position. In line with this process, students need to learn information being presented and understand the opposing group's perspectives. The opposing views and criticisms of the team's position leads to conceptual conflict and uncertainty. This may motivate an active search for more information in hopes of resolving the uncertainty. Indices of epistemic curiosity include an individual's actively searching for more information, seeking to understand opposing positions and rationales and attempting to view the situation from opposing perspectives.

The application of SAC results in more positive outcomes for students which include positive interdependence, face to face promotive interaction, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing. For this reason, therefore, SAC is

also regarded as cooperative learning technique as some principles take place in cooperative context and they are as effort which may be expected to be more productive than competitive and individualistic efforts. Slavin (1990: 3) claims that cooperative learning, involving SAC, shares the idea that students work together to learn and responsible for their team-mate learning as well as their own. This idea is in line with SAC model in which it shares the criteria: a task for group completion, discussion and resolution, face to face interaction in small group, an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual helpfulness within each group and individual accountability.

From the discussion, it can be justified that SAC is a group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others (Olsen & Kagan, 1992). Shortly, it can be said that SAC is a cooperative form of debate.

2.2 Critical Thinking through Structured Academic Controversy

Teachers, particularly who teach at university level, are aware of the importance of critical thinking skills as one of outcomes of student learning. It is believed that critical thinking skills help students learn optimally, facilitate them to improve their knowledge independently, as well as bring them succeed in the workplace. Hence, most teachers are encouraged to adapt or adopt various good teaching practices and arrange language instruction to provide students with the skills.

Primarily the literature on critical thinking has roots in two primary academic disciplines: philosophy and psychology (Lewis & Smith, 1993). From the philosophical tradition views, it is noted that critical thinking is a thinking that is goal-directed and purposive, “thinking aimed at forming a judgment,” where the thinking itself meets standards of adequacy and accuracy (Bailin et al., 1999: 287); or “judging in a reflective way what to do or what to believe” (Facione, 2000: 61). Meanwhile, from the cognitive psychological perspective, it is defined as “the use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome” (Halpern, 1998: 450); or “seeing both sides of an issue, being open to new evidence that disconfirms your ideas, reasoning dispassionately, demanding that claims be backed by evidence, deducing and inferring conclusions from available facts, solving problems, and so forth” (Willingham, 2007: 8).

Critical thinking is as a part of the process of evaluating the evidence collected in problem solving or the results produced by thinking creatively (Crowl et al., 1997; Lewis & Smith, 1993). Critical thinking requires the component skills of analyzing arguments, making inferences using inductive or deductive reasoning, judging or evaluating, and making

decisions or solving problems. Critical thinking involves both cognitive skills and dispositions. These dispositions, which can be seen as attitudes or habits of mind, include open- and fair-mindedness, inquisitiveness, flexibility, a propensity to seek reason, a desire to be well-informed, and a respect for and willingness to entertain diverse viewpoints (Lai, 2011).

To cope with the need of helping students to foster their learning and critical thinking, the application of SAC seems in line with the way students' thinking process and is potentially applied in the classroom. This may happen because when teachers structure the controversy, students are encouraged to rehearse orally the information or issue they are learning; advocate position; share and teach their knowledge to peers, analyze, critically evaluate, and rebut information; reason deductively; and synthesize and integrate information into factual and judgmental conclusions that are summarized into a joint position to which all sides can agree (Johnson & Johnson, 1988: 59). Therefore, teachers are demanded not only to transfer knowledge to students, but also to facilitate students and teach them to think about their own thinking processes as it is quoted by (Kauchak & Eggen, 1998). This effort seems crucial as students become aware of their thinking processes; they realize how their own personal makeup can play a role in how they make their choices and interpret situations (Jacobs, 1994).

Hence, SAC can encourage students' active participation in the classroom and trigger critical thinking. This justification is also in line with the idea stated by Kahneman et al. (1982) that with time and more experience in systematic thinking, individuals and groups can develop the principles to guide decision making. Providing students with opportunities to engage in SAC enables them to have their ideas and conclusions challenged by advocates of an opposing position. As it is noted by Duffy et al. (1998), collaborative problem solving, collaborative inquiry, and critical thinking involve building an argument for a position by considering evidence and counterarguments. They confirm that a critical thinker will develop a strong argument in defining and interpreting the problem, in developing and evaluating solutions, in developing a plan based on a selected solution, and in reflecting on the learning outcomes.

2.3 A Model of EFL Learning through Structured Academic Controversy

The model of SAC is dynamic that is fitted with the need of students in learning. Teachers may structure the process of SAC based on the level of students' proficiency, experience in learning, learning resources, as well as the subject matter being taught. This section attempts to provide a model of SAC in EFL context at university level.

a) Choosing the discussion topic

The first thing to do to present SAC is to choose interesting and challenging topics in the area of EFL contexts to discuss. The topics may be taken from some current contextual issues that students are familiar enough with in order that students have sufficient prior knowledge or ideas to be confronted. However, not all of the topics are manageable, easy to discuss, nor provide two-equal documented positions.

b) Preparing instructional materials

Teachers prepare materials needed for both two sides. They have to provide a summary of resources materials, bibliography, or assign pairs to browse in internet in order that each pair has broader understanding about the issue being advocated and provide adequate evidence for and elaboration of their arguments. More importantly, teachers should provide pairs with a clear description of the tasks, procedures of academic controversy, and collaborative skills to be used during each phase.

c) Structuring the controversy

To create successful academic controversy, teachers have to commit with the main principle requirements for promoting constructive controversy. Firstly, teachers should arrange a model of SAC that is going to implement or modify some stages of activities and explain the procedures clearly. Additionally, teachers have to structure learning activities and environment in cooperative situation by repositioning students' chairs in such cooperative forms, grouping them heterogeneously in ability level, sex, and personality and convincing them the ultimate purpose of learning with SAC that is to discuss and solve the issue cooperatively rather than to debate and solely seek the winner. Students are in free risk environment to learn, practice their language, and challenge each other's ideas and reasoning, but they should respect one another. Besides, teachers may give valuable ideas on how to manage the controversy in order that they can learn to value disagreements as important sources to learn new information and enhance their knowledge, not as personal attacks.

d) Conducting the activity of academic controversy.

After a series of activities above, teachers can engage students in academic controversy activities. Teachers give specific instructions and engage students into these five stages of SAC procedures as follows.

- Learning positions; the activity includes reading the materials supporting the assigned position, understanding the information by making lists on key concepts and plan a persuasive presentation.
- Presenting positions; Each pair takes turn to present the position forcefully and persuasively. When the pair presents the position, other

listens and learns the opposing position carefully by taking notes on important information or anything needed to clarify.

- Discussing the issue; after finishing off presentation, each pair then begins to argue the opposing position forcefully in turns. When the pair presents argumentation, the opposing pair listens attentively to prepare counter-arguments. And then the opposing pair presents counter-arguments by providing as many facts to support point of view. In turns, then the pair questions the opposing position's view point or asks to clarify some vague ideas and so on.
- Reversing perspective; it is a time to reflect the result of discussion. Each pair is assigned to reverse perspectives by organizing and presenting the opposing position as sincerely and forcefully as they can. It is needed to elaborate the position by relating it to other information that has been acquired.
- Reaching a decision; the last step is to sum up and synthesize the best arguments for both points of view. The pairs are assigned to make a report basing on the result of academic controversy.

The following table provides information how to plan academic controversy in a classroom hour.

<p>A. Pre-activities (15-20'):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Select issue to serve as focus of academic controversy. ◆ Forming the class into groups of two pairs (AA, BB). Assigning AA team to take the pro position; while BB takes con position. ◆ Stating the objectives, giving brief instruction towards the activities and tasks being assigned, and explaining the criteria of success.
<p>B. Main Activities (60-20):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Giving chances to pairs to read materials, discuss, and take a note of arguments for each position ◆ Asking AA to present arguments forcefully and persuasively in advance, and assigning BB to listen attentively, may not interrupt or question. ◆ In turn, BB present arguments to AA who listen but may not interrupt or question yet. ◆ Assigning both pairs to discuss the issue. AA present facts to support the position, question or argue with BB's position, while BB listen to the opposing pair's position attentively. ◆ In turns, BB support their viewpoint and then present counter arguments. (The step of discussing issue is intentionally repeated and structured depend on the time allotment and the need) ◆ Asking the teams to work in pair to reverse the roles and perspectives by organizing and presenting the opposing position as sincerely and forcefully as they can, then assigning the pairs to adopt important information from opposing position and elaborate their position by relating it to the information they have previously learned. ◆ Assigning pairs to reach decision. They are asked to work together to review the arguments and achieve a consensus position; AA represent their argumentation as before, and then followed by BB.
<p>C. Post instructional activities(10-15)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Providing any clarification on the terms or viewpoints that are vague or incomplete and giving feedback focused on content. ◆ Asking students to voluntarily sum up the result of discussion. ◆ Highlighting the process of present academic controversy and suggestion for next academic controversy. ◆ Leave taking

e). *providing clarification and feedback*

In order to reduce uncertainty about the correctness of students' point of views, it is suggested that teachers spend a couple of minutes to have clarification prior to terms or viewpoints that are vague or incomplete. Feedback focused on the content is essential for students. Hence, teachers may provide students with current information that is not coped with the discussion to enrich their knowledge. It is also essential to inform students the process of academic controversy they have done, how well the pairs conduct the activities, use their language, and perform in the discussion. These may give fruitful suggestion both students and teachers what skills need to improve and how to enhance the next controversy.

3. Concluding Remark

Engaging students in structured academic controversy enables them to have their own ideas and conclusions challenged by advocates of an opposing position. The conceptual conflict resulting from ACM promotes constructive and reflective activities. These make students are more aware of their learning and better able to develop particular topic or issue and their thinking skills to a wider variety of situations or evidence of their reasoning. This is because students are accustomed and motivated to develop a strong argument in defining and interpreting the problem, developing and evaluating solutions, developing a plan based on a selected solution, and reflecting on the learning outcomes. Hence, it can be justified that the application of SAC can encourage students' active participation in the classroom and trigger critical thinking. Since the application of SAC is fruitful and effective, therefore, teachers are suggested to use and develop this strategy in order that students are challenged and motivated to practice their English collaboratively as well as gain the optimum result on their achievement.

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¹ ANDI SUSILO is an EFL lecturer at English Department-State College of Islamic Studies Ponorogo. He holds his BA and MA in English language Education from Jember University and Islamic University of Malang. His research interests include ELT Methodology, ESP and EFL/ESL Writing.

² RESTU MUFANTI is currently a lecturer of Muhammadiyah University of Ponorogo and has taught EFL at university level for a decade. She earns her BA and MA in Language Education from Jember University and State University of Surabaya consecutively. Her research interests are on ELT Methodology and EFL/ESL Speaking.