

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF DOCTORATE CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS

Zuliati Rohmah

IAIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Jl. A. Yani 117 Surabaya 60237, email: zuliati@sunan-ampel.ac.id

Abstract: The paper presents doctorate students' perceptions of classroom discussions. The data were collected from interviews with students involved intensively in classroom discussions. The results show that the students have five positive perceptions of classroom discussions. The paper will also highlight some inhibitions arising from different cultural backgrounds of the discussion participants. Discussion and suggestions are put forward at the end of the paper.

Keywords: doctorate classroom discussions, students' perceptions, critical thinking.

A number of studies have been conducted on university discussions (Rohmah, 2006; Basturkmen, 2002; Morita, 2000; Tracy & Baratz, 1993; Tracy & Carjuzaa, 1993; Waring, 2000, 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Weissberg, 1993). A study on graduate seminars as an independent genre has been done by Weissberg (1993). The seminars she refers to are speech events that involve activities such as an introduction of the faculty member serving as the student's academic advisor done by the presiding professor, an introduction of the student speaker by the academic advisor, a presentation by the student and a question session. These kinds of activities are more likely to be present in a doctoral seminar in which doctoral students communicate their research proposal for their coming dissertation or a report of their original research for a dissertation.

Weissberg (1993) observes that the ideal seminar is a speech to have a communication where the speaker directly addresses an audience, not as a memorized or read-aloud paper. In seminars, the speaker is expected to communicate with the audience friendly, and address the audience in the first person, so that the audience feel involved in the discussion process. A discussion will not run well without any responses from the audience. Therefore, meaning is negotiated and constructed by the speaker and the audience. Thomas (in Basturkmen, 2002:234-235) criticises a view of meaning in seminars as given by the presenter, because it is concerned with what an individual speaker wishes to achieve or present in talk. Instead, he argues that meaning is discussed rather than given, and that

speaker and participants work together to construct meaning. The success of discussions depends on a shared discourse; the speaker and participants exchange information, and put an argument in a co-operative search for comprehension, conceptual learning and sharpening of intelligence. Therefore, the groups which allow fair interaction and collaboration among all discussants are likely to enjoy best learning opportunities (de Klerk & Hunt, 2000).

In Tracy and Carjuzaa's work (1993), discussion situations were analyzed to see how participants displayed and oriented institutional and intellectual identities in the intellectual meetings. Institutional identity (rank) was enacted through three primary activities: talk and silence patterns, question types, and responses to non-comprehension. The analysis of the discussions suggests that intellectual and institutional identities are the most notable in the intellectual discussions.

Additionally, Tracy and Baratz (1993) studied a weekly colloquium in an academic department which had not been the subject of much study. This study, which used interviews to obtain the data, had three main objectives. The first was to offer an in-depth investigation of the multiple and frequently conflicting concerns that appeared in an intellectual discussion, and the second was to draw a model of how intellectual discussants in general put attributions to one another. This study also aimed at criticising context-general theories using the results from the case study. Among her many findings was that the discussants faced interactive dilemma in the discussions. The participants wanted "to be seen as

intellectually competent“, but did not want “to be seen as trying to be seen as smart” (Tracy & Baratz, 1993:306). They thought that tough questions could give impression that the questioner was clever; however, it often made the student speaker undergo a hard time to handle the question. It could be a kind of “boomerang“, because it was “too attacking” (Tracy & Baratz, 1993:310).

Furthermore, using data from actual interaction, Waring (2000, 2001, 2002a&b) studied a series of weekly seminars held at Teachers College, Columbia University in which faculty members and graduate students shared their ideas. In her study conducted in 2000, she examined seven and a half hours of seminar discussions on second language literacy in her attempt to better understand how members of graduate seminar use discourse strategies to manage the floor, construct understandings, and maintain group cohesiveness. During discussions, students apply seminar strategies. The strategies include conversational management strategies, topic management strategies and social strategies.

Waring (2001) further examined talk in five weekly graduate seminars in which the participants were both master students and beginning level of doctoral students. In such mixed-participant meetings, the capability of the student to be intellectually bright without giving impression as trying to boast was studied. It is related to how the seminar participants handle the tricky task of disagreeing and critiquing. Waring found out two strategies applied by participants to express their disagreement while at the same time maintain a good cooperation and save others' face. The two strategies are 'peer referencing' and 'asserting vulnerability'.

Rohmah (2003) also reported her study on classroom discussions held during a summer curriculum workshop on Russian Studies in a Midwestern U.S. university. In her study, she focused on strategies in asking questions, giving opinions, expressing disagreements and interrupting by the participants. She found that the students applied strategies when performing the four actions during the discussions.

Morita (2000) conducted an eight month ethnographic study of a graduate classroom discussion. Her findings suggest that students gradually become skillful in oral academic discourse after being trained through their negotiations with instructors and peers as they prepared for, observed, performed, and reviewed oral presentations. Based on her findings, she argues that academic discourse socialization should be seen as a potentially multifaceted and conflicting process of negotiation.

In short, during the discussions, participants try to enact their intellectual identity while being involved in the process of seeking shared understanding. This often put them in a dilemmatic position. They solve this by applying certain strategies which can be trained to the students. Whilst these studies were conducted in western university context, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there has not been any study on the students' perception toward discussions. Therefore, the present study focused on how university students in an Indonesian context see discussions.

METHOD

The data for the present study were collected from seven doctorate students of a state university in East Java who were taking a course in which discussions were held to sharpen their understanding of the materials. All of the doctorate students had obtained their masters in education or applied linguistics in their home country and abroad. The students were English lecturers at some universities in Indonesia. To be more specific, one student was from Sumatra, four students from East Java, one from East Nusa Tenggara, and another student was an Ambonese who was teaching at a university in Manado. The data were collected through interviews with the students. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed to see the students' notable pattern of perceptions of classroom discussions. The current study was part of a larger study where observations to fourteen classroom discussions were also conducted.

RESULTS

Based on the interviews with the students, the researcher summarizes the students' perception about classroom discussions into five important points. The five features are discussed in the subsequent sections.

Views on the Classroom Discussion as an Arena to Exchange Ideas and Exercise Critical Thinking

Koko, a student from Sumatra Island, states that the most important concern during the discussion is to share ideas with his classmates. Sharing ideas means expressing and receiving ideas. When he expresses his ideas, he does not mean to put down the addressee and raises himself up. When he presents an article, he also expects his friends to give him their opinion and comment. He admits that through sharing ideas, he learns many things.

"Share, share, share.<Sha:re>, makanya saya aga::k, aga::k, bukan kecewa ya, tapi saya itu pingin ngomong dengan teman-teman, kalau diskusi itu jangan dirasakan kita memberikan masukan itu dirasakan di:: diterjemahkan dengan imej yang negative, ya, apalagi kalau kita memberikan masukan. Saya lebih kepada share, memberikan, share. Tidak ada, usaha kita, terutama saya secara pribadi saya ingin menonjolkan diri, karena dari dulu saya tidak perlu, tidak terbiasa, saya tidak terbiasa dengan menonjol-nonjolkan diri. Benar, benar. Saya tidak terbiasa, di lingkungan kerja pun saya seperti itu. Cuman kalau share, saya setuju. Saya sangat concern terhadap itu. (Interview 4, 21/4/05)

Koko's statement is supported by Tia who admits that she can learn many things from others. From the discussion, she can also understand the reality of multi truth, that the truth does not come from a single person from a single perspective, but it may come from various persons with different perspectives.

"*Saya bisa belajar dari presenter, saya bisa belajar dari yang lain, mendapatkan banyak dari yang lain. Karena saya, dengan siapapun saya bisa belajar, tidak, tidak harus selalu dengan temen yang mungkin, dengan siapapun, ya mungkin siapa lah. Itu, apa ya, saya bisa belajar dengan mereka. Banyak yang bisa saya dapatkan dari mereka. ... Saya sangat terkesan dengan yang dikatakan Pak S ((the professor)) tentang multi truth.*" (Interview 5, 7/6/05)

Tia's ability and willingness to accept multi truth is apparent, for instance, when she redefines her position after being disagreed through a question by Ovi and she refuses another's opinion, but still acknowledges her addressee's strong points.

Similar attitudes are also shown by Adi. Adi conveys that exchanging ideas also means that when he does not have adequate knowledge about certain topic, he may rely on his friends to explain about it. This is realized by being ready to admit his own weaknesses and open to other's view.

"Kemudian untuk kalau nanti ada pertanyaan itu, kalau saya ndak bisa ya langsung saya kembalikan kepada floor. Saya melihat sebenarnya ini adalah, apa itu, tidak terjawab, dari pada nanti jawaban saya itu dipaksakan, dan orang-orang lain juga tahu, akhirnya tidak memuaskan, begitu, karena itu *saya lemparkan kepada floor....* Saya nggak akan memaksakan suatu jawaban yang ini benar, ndak." (Interview 1, 10/4/05)

In addition to Adi, Koko and Tia, Ais also stresses that discussion is a forum to share ideas. She admits that she can learn many things from the

discussion. She can exchange ideas with her friends. When she has some information to reveal to her friends, she will do it delightedly.

E:: enggak sih, *saya pingin share aja*, untuk melaksanakan tugas. Kemudian saya nggak seneng kalau, kalau saya bertugas saya mesti bawa-bawa. Yang pertama memang saya melaksanakan tugas yang disuruh, ini makalahnya ini, artikelnya ini. Tapi setelah itu, *saya share apa, additional information* itu yang saya tahu. Bukannya saya sok itu bukan. Besok saya presentasi. Tapi apakah tujuannya, bukan tujuan ya. Karena saya banyak tahu, ya saya share. Tujuannya apa saya share, ya nambah nilai. Ndak ada keinginan untuk pamer ilmu, tapi bahwa apa yang saya jelaskan ini, karena sudah cukup lengkap, ndak apa-apa saya ndak bawa apa-apa di kuliahnya Pak S ((the professor)). Saya cari cari ndak ada, tapi saya itu inginnya ya apa lagi ya yang perlu ditampilkan untuk mendukung penjelasan. Ya, saya utamanya, banyak tentang testing, dua kali saya, waktu itu yang pertama, saya cukup berat. Yang pertama itu saya ndak tahu harus menampilkan apa, maka saya bawalah CD interaktif, itu satu-satunya yang bisa saya bawa dan saya ingin waktu itu di kelas computer, saya tunjukkan ini lho interaktifnya. Nah untuk di sini saya bisa bawa buku TOEIC. Ini lho TOEIC itu seperti ini. Besok saya test standardized test, misalnya, saya tunjukkan macam-macamnya, ciri-cirinya saya buat ringkasan. Seperti ini lho anu itu, sudah jadi. Tinggal motokopi. Ini seperti ini, karena saya tertarik pada standardized test. Maka saya tambahi. Waktu itu next generation TOEFL, waktu itu untuk kelasnya Pak Ali, nah ini *saya mau share dengan teman-teman*. Saya selalu begitu bukan karena saya sok tahu..." (Interview 8, 19/5/05)

Similar opinion about discussion is disclosed by Ovi. In Ovi's view, classroom discussion is an opportunity to promote better understanding. Through the discussion, she can share a meaningful experience with friends and the professor, which she cannot read from books.

"Kalau menurut saya tidak semua bisa dibaca dari buku. Seperti komentar-komentar yang diberikan oleh Pak S ((the professor)) itu banyak yang tidak bisa ditemukan di buku. Itu harus dialami. Misalnya gitu. Seperti di Alpen itu penunjuk jalan dalam 8 bahasa 2 diantaranya Korea dan Jepang. Mungkin bisa kita dapat baca dari buku tapi kan sulit nyarinya. Itu lebih baik dialami.... Iya. Atau yang culture tadi, tamu yang di Jepang disuruh mandi, dia nggak mau mandi. Itu kalau nggak di alami koyoke nggak anu yo, nggak sempat terceritakan. Walaupun mungkin kita baca dari buku, namun pemahaman kita nggak se::, se untuk hal culture itu ya, kita mbaca dari buku, tapi pemahaman kita nggak sejelas kalau kita e: conversation gitu ya, dialog itu lebih anu, lebih jelas." (Interview 12, 17/5/05)

Finally, Joni also values the classroom discussion as a meeting that gives him and other participants a chance to exercise their critical thinking. This is, especially, because the participants can convey their opinion openly that enable the discussion to run well. Moreover, the discussion can refresh his mind of topics that he has not recalled for a long time.

“Menurut saya bagus sekali. Artinya e: semua kan no::l, itu yang bagus, ngomong apa adanya. Dan semuanya menerima pendapat, kalau menolak dengan alasan. Saya secara personal, suka ya, saya tidak tahu menurut ibu. Saya secara pribadi saya bersyukur saya sudah bersama teman-teman. ... O, pasti. Selama sekian tahun tidak pernah diskusi seperti ini. Kecuali kalau umpamanya lagi tugas untuk penataran, waktu itu e: kesempatan apa itu ya, saya pernah ke Bandung, ke Bogor selama 2 hari ada conference, international conference di Bali, lalu diskusi seperti ini to.” (Interview 10, 27/5/05).

Thus, sharing ideas is the most important thing the students expect during the discussion. This is evidenced by the fact that the discussions run well throughout the semester, except when Edo aggravates his disagreement with Ovi which results in a communication deadlock. During the discussions, when a participant conveys his/her opinion, another participant responds it by showing either an agreement or a disagreement, a support or a question. Hence, the exchange of ideas proceeds well.

Views on Different Ideas

The second prominent feature of the students' view about discussion is that different ideas are encouraged. All state this way, except Ovi and Edo. Adi argues that agreement and disagreement in academic meeting should be perceived as something acceptable as far as it is supported by plausible argument. Even, Adi states that different opinion should be encouraged for the search of knowledge.

“Saya kira di forum-forum ilmiah yang kita lakukan di kampus itu kan tempatnya kita untuk mengatakan setuju dan juga tidak setuju. Dengan berbagai konsekuensi artinya kalau setuju itu ya kita menunjukkan mengapa kita setuju, demikian juga sebaliknya kalau tidak setuju mengapa kita tidak setuju. Ini yang penting, sehingga orang lain itu bisa berpikir bahwa pendapatnya si A itu lebih dapat diterima ketimbang pendapat saya atau sebaliknya, pendapat saya lebih convincing ketimbang pendapatnya di dengan argument yang saya paparkan. Dalam hal seperti ini seharusnya saya kalau kita nggak setuju kemudian orang lain itu setuju, kita-pun juga baik-baik saja menerima pendapatnya itu.

... Sehingga kalau kita berbeda pendapat itu suatu hal yang sangat wajar sekali, dan itu harus, dalam forum akademik dan a: apapun namanya karena memang di situlah tempat kita menambah khasanah perbendaharaan ilmu, body of knowledge, itu ya, di situ itu.” (Interview 3, 3/6/05)

Koko also states similar opinion that discussion is a place where questions and critiques should not be seen as attacks to others. He himself feels that different opinions enable him to learn and exercise his critical thinking.

Menurut saya, S3 itu diskusi, itu yang benar. Diskusi dan diskusi terus. Jangan mikirkan, jangan memikirkan orang itu kalau memberi pertanyaan menjatuhkan kita. Makanya saya secara guyon dengan teman, seperti Pak Joni misalnya, “Pak Joni, kalau saya yang presentasi, dalam bahasa preman, saya itu diembat-embat saja. Ditonjok-tonjok aja, ndak apa-apa. ndak apa-apa. Jangan pikirkan apa-apa.” Di situ saya belajar, saya bilang dengan teman-teman seperti itu.” (Interview 4, 21/4/05)

Likewise, Tia also suggests that disagreements during discussions are not only acceptable, but they can help her open up her horizons to reach better understanding. When asked about whether she can accept another's different opinion, she replies as follows:

“It's okay. it's okay. Terutama yang saya belajar dari Pak S ((the professor)) adalah multi truth. We have to realize that. Kita kan jadi wise, jadi kita kan jadi, saya ndak apa-apa. It's okay.... Saya sangat terkesan dengan yang dikatakan Pak S ((the professor)) tentang *multi truth* dan bahwa kita harus control our emotion, untuk bisa tetep tampil manis dengan, sekalipun toh kita tidak sependapat dengan mereka.” (Interview 5, 7/6/05)

Similar to Adi, Koko and Tia, Ais and Joni state the same ideas about the importance of different stance during discussion. Ais even conveys that when her contribution is regarded irrelevant by others, she accepts it openly. She shows it when Joni tells her that she has gone to the wrong way in answering Ovi's question. Asked about this, she states:

“Oh, tersinggung? Ndak. Saya jadi sadar bahwa tadi saya ngomongnya nggak terarah. He eh. Oh ya aku tadi ngomongnya ke sana ke mari. Ya, saya diarahkan, saya langsung mengoreksi jawaban.” (Interview 8, 19/5/05)

Joni also has a similar attitude toward disagreements. He considers that differences in opinions and perspectives during discussion are just natural.

“Kalau saya sudah menyadari bahwa soal berbeda pendapat dengan teman itu biasa. Jadi kalau saya

mengatakan saya berbeda pendapat dengan teman, saya katakan. Tapi kalau berbedanya relatif, berarti separoh setuju, separo tidak to, saya katakana begitu. Dan saya sadar itu, kalau saya benar, teman juga mungkin benar. ... saya biasanya mengatakan dengan cara halus. Seperti 'saya setuju, tapi tidak 100%.' (Interview 10, 27/5/05)

When expressing a disagreement, he means it to show his different stance from others. He does not mean it, for example, to challenge others.

"... saya tidak berniat untuk challenge, tetapi saya mengatakan apa adanya. Saya biasa mengatakan 'kalau menurut saya begini, begini.' Itulah, bukan ada ada emosi ketika melakukan, jadi saya memang mengatakan apa adanya. Kalau saya setuju, ya setuju. Kalau setengah setuju ya setengah setuju." (Interview 10, 27/5/05)

Unlike the five students who can accept and respect differences in opinion during discussions, Ovi and Edo show different attitudes. Ovi feels that it is peculiar to have a different stance. She feels that she still cannot accept different opinion openly and easily.

"Saya juga merasa, bahwa kita belum bisa sepenuhnya menerima kritik atau orang disagree itu dengan lapang dada. ... Iya, karena mungkin kita merasa kita itu bener, terus kita merasa kita itu pintar. Itu ketika ada orang disagree, dan kita merasa dia itu (bodo), kita itu merasa ya malu, kecewa gitu. Walaupun halus, atau gimana ya.." (Interview 12, 17/5/05)

Edo shows ambiguous attitudes toward disagreements. When asked whether he can accept differences in opinion, he suggests that differences in opinion make him disturbed.

Z: Kalau misalnya kebetulan berbeda pendapat dengan orang? Itu terganggu gitu juga nggak, Pak?

Edo: E:: ketika ngomong seperti sekarang ini di depan Ibu saya nggak terganggu, pulang saya terganggu.

Z: Kepikiran gitu?

Edo: Heehm. Ini saya mau ngomong apa adanya, Bu.

(Interview 6, 12/5/05)

Later, however, he clarifies that he feels disturbed when another's opinion is illogical. When it is rational, he can accept and respect it.

"Sejauh itu hal yang sifatnya a: argument, it's okay. ndak ada masalah aku.... Kalau sudah masuk ke akal, sejauh masuk akal ndak ada masalah itu. Biasanya yang ndak masuk akal menurut saya, itu yang terganggu saya, itu." (Interview 6, 12/5/05)

Hence, most of the students see disagreements as something acceptable, and, even, encouraged to promote a better and more refined understanding.

Views on Quality Argument

Whilst a disagreement is alright during discussion, it should be supported by plausible argument and logical explanation. Adi states it this way:

"Saya kira di forum-forum ilmiah yang kita lakukan di kampus itu kan tempatnya kita untuk mengatakan setuju dan juga tidak setuju. Dengan berbagai konsekuensi artinya kalau setuju itu ya kita menunjukkan mengapa kita setuju, demikian juga sebaliknya kalau tidak setuju mengapa kita tidak setuju. Ini yang penting, sehingga orang lain itu bisa berpikir bahwa pendapatnya si A itu lebih dapat diterima ketimbang pendapat saya atau sebaliknya, pendapat saya lebih convincing ketimbang pendapatnya di dengan argumen yang saya paparkan." (Interview 3, 3/6/05)

Therefore, Adi often mentions adequate reasons and/or explanation when expressing disagreements. This occurs, for example, when Adi attends to his addressee's point, intensifies his opinion to H, claims non-comprehension, offers an opinion, hedges his opinion during disagreements, he mentions reasons and/or explanation. However, there is also a chance when he does not support his opinions with an adequate account and argument.

Edo strengthens Adi's statement by saying that different opinions that he can accept is that which is based on certain reason and argument.

"Sejauh itu hal yang sifatnya a: argumen, it's okay. ndak ada masalah aku. ... Kalau sudah masuk ke akal, sejauh masuk akal ndak ada masalah itu. Biasanya yang ndak masuk akal menurut saya, itu yang terganggu saya itu. ... Yang berpengaruh bagi saya itu masuk akal dengan tidak masuk akal. Saya sudah terbiasa jadi orang ngomong kasar, biasa saja. Selesai pulang, saya cek ini. Cek, cari buku, ada orang ngomong gini. Kalau pendapatnya bener, masuk akal bagi saya, nggak masalah. Kalau enggak, enggak enak." (Interview 6, 12/5/05)

Furthermore, Ais admits that she always considers and thinks over the points she is going to comment on. She does not want to express her opinion without a strong reasoning basis.

"Yang pasti jangan diam, kalau ngomong *jangan asal ngomong*. Itu memang saya jaga. Makanya biasanya memang saya ngomong yang terakhir, jarang saya ngomong pertama kali. *Saya baru ngomong kalau saya yakin bahwa ide saya bagus ya*. Saya sangat berhati-hati, jangan sampai silly

question, ideas. Itu yang saya jaga, karena ada faktor nilai itu, jelas. Tetapi, itulah sebabnya saya sukanya terakhir, apakah kedua, ketiga, tetapi saya jarang sekali pertama. ... Saya pikir kok nggak bener orang apalagi sekarang S3, sejak dulu pun saya nggak mau asal ngomong. Saya ngomong pasti tak pikir dulu. Jangan sampai ya itu tadi, silly. (Interview 8, 19/5/05)

Hence, the quality argument is important in having fruitful discussions.

Views on How to Manage Personal Feelings during Discussions

From the preceding sections, it is disclosed that differences in opinion are just alright, and quality argument is encouraged. As the consequence of these, the students also think that personal feelings should be controlled during academic discussions. This is stated, especially, by Adi and Tia. Adi stresses that any personal feeling should be controlled, especially, during disagreements in academic discussions.

“Tetapi dalam forum ilmiah menurut saya e: *faktor pribadi* yang turut mempengaruhi apa itu cara kita berpikir seharusnya dihilangkan karena apa, yang namanya perdebatan atau menyikapi perbedaan pendapat tertentu itu kan suatu hal yang wajar. ... Dalam hal seperti ini seharusnya saya kalau kita nggak setuju kemudian orang lain itu setuju, kitapun juga baik-baik saja menerima pendapatnya itu. *Ndak usah faktor pribadi, misalkan, atau mood yang tidak baik itu diikutkan* atau dilibatkan sehingga menjadi hal yang sangat mempengaruhi dalam beragumen.” (Interview 3, 3/6/05)

Tia supports Adi's opinion that personal feelings should be controlled.

“Saya sangat terkesan dengan yang dikatakan Pak S tentang multi truth dan bahwa kita harus *control our emotion*, untuk bisa tetap tampil manis dengan, sekalipun toh kita tidak sependapat dengan mereka. Itu. *Ndak apa-apa*.” (Interview 5, 7/6/05)

However, some of the students still cannot control their emotion during classroom discussion. It is apparent, for example, when Ovi cannot stand with Edo's aggravated disagreement because she involves her personal feelings too much in handling Edo's disagreement. In the mean time, Edo does not consider Ovi's feelings when he aggravates his disagreement with Ovi. A communication deadlock will not occur if he thinks about Ovi's feeling and stops torturing her with questions which irritate her. In the other occasions, Edo considers his feelings too much that prevent him from participating actively in the discussions.

Views on Self Aggrandizement

None of the discussion participants uses the discussion meetings as a forum to obtain a self-empowerment. It is right that they try to show their best, but, they do not intend to do it for a self-aggrandizement. When appointed as a presenter, for example, Tia tries to make her presentation interesting. She tries to do it by paying attention to where the climax of her presentation, and when she should end her presentation.

“Kalau saya, saya bisa anu, ya, saya bisa, kayak kimaks, gitu ya. Saya berusaha presentasi saya interesting, dan saya mengakhirinya dengan sesuatu yang interesting, sehingga mereka berkesan. Itu, jadi itu yang sebetulnya saya inginkan. Tapi saya nggak tahu bagaimana jadinya. ... E:: jadi saya berhenti saat interesting. Masih interesting. Tapi saya masih tetap bisa berkomunikasi dengan mereka, nggak, nggak membosankan. Tapi saya nggak tahu, apakah saya begitu, kan yang menilai audiensnya. Itu sebetulnya yang saya inginkan sebagai seorang presenter.” (Interview 5, 7/6/05)

Similarly, Ais also tries her best when she should present her paper, however, her aim is not to achieve a self-enhancement.

“*Bukannya saya sok itu bukan*. Besok saya presentasi. Tapi apakah tujuannya, bukan tujuan ya. Karena saya banyak tahu, ya saya share. Tujuannya apa saya share, ya nambah nilai. *Ndak ada keinginan untuk pamer ilmu*. ... Besok saya test standardized test, misalnya, saya tunjukkan macam-macamnya, ciri-cirinya saya buat ringkasan. Seperti ini lho anu itu, sudah jadi. Tinggal motokopi. Ini seperti ini, karena saya tertarik pada standardized test. Maka saya tambahi. Waktu itu next generation TOEFL, waktu itu untuk kelasnya Pak A, nah ini saya mau share dengan teman-teman. Saya selalu begitu *bukan karena saya sok tahu*...” (Interview 8, 19/5/05)

This is emphasized by Koko who states that his intention of being active in classroom discussion is not to show off to attain a self-aggrandizement.

“Saya lebih kepada share, memberikan, share. Tidak ada, usaha kita, terutama saya secara pribadi saya ingin menonjolkan diri, karena dari dulu saya tidak perlu, tidak terbiasa, saya tidak terbiasa dengan menonjol-nonjolkan diri. ... Saya seperti itu, benar. Dan dalam, dalam yang harus saya beberapa kali tekankan, mungkin gaya saya atau apa, seperti mau menonjolkan diri, saya tidak pernah ada mau menonjolkan diri. Tidak. Tidak saya tidak terbiasa dengan menonjolkan diri.” (Interview 4, 21/4/05)

Therefore, challenging and attacking others is not apparent during discussion. This is emphasized by Ais that all participants are collaborative; they support to each other by agreeing and disagreeing with one another. She expresses it by mentioning another participant's comment with which she agrees.

"Waktu itu itu Bu Ovi pernah bilang, di sini diskusi kok enak ya, ndak pernah njatuh-njatuhkan teman. Endak, ndak pernah sejak masuk sampai sekarang kita ndak pernah njatuh-njatuhkan teman. Kalau nggak setuju, ya dikatakan, karena nggak sependapat, tapi ndak ada niatan untuk menjatuhkan atau challenge." (Interview 8, 19/5/05)

Besides, she also states that the discussion is alive, just like what the researcher feels. This is probably because the participants choose their own topic from the provided journals to be presented. This enables the students to find topics which they like and are interested in.

"Itu topiknya milih sendiri kok. Milih sendiri. Pak S ((the professor)) memberi jurnal banyak. Pilihen yang kamu mau 2. kalau di kelas wawasan, pilihen ya 2 ya 3. Kalau sedikit ya 3, kalau banyak ya 2. Milih sendiri, ya mungkin itu yang bikin hidup." (Interview 8, 19/5/05)

Hence, self-aggrandizement which is popular in Tracy and Carjuzaa (1993) and Viechnicki (1997) is not found in the doctorate English Program discussions. Whether this will put an effect on their grade at the end of the semester is something else. She also admits that expecting to have a good grade is just natural and that is always accompanying all efforts done within the context of managing the subject tasks.

"O, jelas, kalau saya diam, ya saya nggak dapat nilai. Yang pasti jangan diam, kalau ngomong jangan asal ngomong. Itu memang saya jaga. Makanya biasanya memang saya ngomong yang terakhir, jarang saya ngomong pertama kali. Saya baru ngomong kalau saya yakin bahwa ideas saya bagus ya. Saya sangat berhati-hati, jangan sampai silly question, ideas. Itu yang saya jaga, karena ada factor nilai itu, jelas. Tetapi, itulah sebabnya saya sukanya terakhir, apakah kedua, ketiga, tetapi saya jarang sekali pertama. Kalau Pak Adi itu sering pertama, saya enggak. Saya suka lihat situasi dulu, suka mikir dulu. Di manapun, dalam diskusi apapun saya suka agak belakangan." (Interview 8, 19/5/05)

Related to classroom discussion as an intellectual meeting, it can be summed up that the students, excluding one or two students, view to classroom discussion as an opportunity to sharpen understanding and promote improved knowledge. Therefore,

reasoning should be emphasized and personal feelings should be minimized. Nevertheless, they might feel annoyed when illogical ideas, unreasonable points and implausible thoughts come up during the discussion, such as the case experienced by Edo. Differences in opinion are something tolerated and appreciated. Nothing is wrong with disagreement with another's opinion as long as it is expressed wisely. The students support collaboration among friends in order to obtain better, more refined ideas. In fact, no participant uses the discussion as a forum to obtain a self aggrandizement.

The above points show that the students have positive perceptions of classroom discussions. However, when these are related to the interviews on cultural backgrounds, some contradictions are apparent. Ovi who is a Javanese married to a Padangese person is more influenced by Javanese culture. She feels that she still cannot accept different opinion openly and easily. She thinks that it is part of her Javanese culture that makes her like that.

"Saya juga merasa, bahwa kita belum bisa sepenuhnya menerima kritik atau orang disagree itu dengan lapang dada. ... Iya, karena mungkin kita merasa kita itu bener, terus kita merasa kita itu pinter. Itu ketika ada orang disagree, dan kita merasa dia itu (bodo), kita itu merasa ya malu, kecewa gitu. Walaupun halus, atau gimana ya. Itu culture kita ya, jadi kita belum bisa katakanlah demokratis atau apa ya. ... Berbeda pendapat." (Interview 12, 17/5/05)

When the cultural backgrounds of the discussion participants are examined, there are two groups of cultures which differ one another, that is, Javanese and non Javanese. This is, especially, perceived by those who are non-Javanese who have encountered both groups of cultures directly. Koko states that the notable feature of communication in his area is that people express their ideas in a loud voice and high tone. They also tend to express their message straightforwardly. This is different from Javanese people who tend to express their ideas indirectly and in a lower voice.

"Kalau di lingkungan kami itu sebentar, kalau dibandingkan dengan, dibandingkan dengan, saya bisa lihat, hal itu bermakna ketika saya membandingkan dengan budaya di sini. ... Ya, itu. Ketika saya bandingkan di sini, kayaknya budaya dari Sumatera Selatan, terutama dari kabupaten saya itu kayaknya me::ngungkapkan sesuatu itu lebih::h, lebih lugas. Lebih lugas, itu. Lebih lugas. Dan kadang-kadang diasumsikan keras, ya, padahal sebenarnya bukan dalam konteks keras itu. ... Semuanya, kayaknya, termasuk, nada suara. Makanya di kampung saya, tempat saya tinggal, tetangga sebelah

(di Jawa) ini bilang, “Ini orang Palembang ini ribut terus kalau ngomong.” Iya, tone suaranya memang segitu ya.” (Interview 4, 21/4/05)

He also stresses the differences between Javanese and Sumatran cultures as follows:

“Yang jelasnya setia...p, <kalau> secara umum ya, Sumatera Selatan saya rasakan orang sini sapaannya lebih hangat ketimbang orang kita. Setiap ketemu, kita, kita selalu bagus, Itu yang jelas ya, orang-orang Jawa di sini selalu menyapa, dan kayaknya kita yang malu sendiri, dan kayaknya orang yang tua lebih banyak yang menyapa duluan, kalau di Palembang orang yang muda yang nyapa duluan. Apakah itu faktor budaya, atau apa, seketika saya melihat seperti itu. Apakah di lingkungan saya di sini orang menjustifikasi saya lebih atau bagaimana saya tidak tahu dengan yang itu, tapi yang jelas terjadi dengan saya, saya lebih muda tapi kadang saya disapa duluan oleh orang yang lebih tua dari saya.” (Interview 4, 21/4/05)

Edo, as an Ambonesse married to a Javanese woman also stresses the differences between Javanese and non-Javanese culture.

Edo: Ya, itu tadi, saya terbiasa ngomong blak-blakan, apa adanya, bahkan saya bisa ngomong kasar. Nah, saya kadang khawatir, kalau teman-teman tersinggung dengan kata-kata saya.

Z: Karena Bapak melihat sebagian besar teman dari Jawa gitu ya?

Edo: Hooh. Orang Jawa kan lebih halus dari pada kami.

Interview 6, 12/5/05

Similarly, Joni also perceives the differences between Javanese and non-Javanese cultures.

“Tapi baru pada saat mengetahui mereka punya, baru kita sadar kita punya budaya. Bisa membedakan. Oh ini baik, ada yang baik, ada yang jeleknya juga ternyata. Seperti itu. Setelah kita tahu orang lain punya budaya, kadang-kadang kalau saya tahu budaya di sini, orang Malang sini, saya merasa, o, punya saya masih lebih baik. Tidak selalu merasa lebih jelek.” (Interview 10, 27/5/05)

In short, the Javanese students and students from outside of Java have different perceptions on how they should communicate with one another.

DISCUSSION

The majority of the participants have supportive attitudes toward discussions that may promote good process of discussions in the classroom. Despite the fine process of the classroom discussions in general, some hindrance for a better discussion

are also evident. When we cast our attention further to the barriers, we notice that they are connected to cultural and personality aspects involved during the discussions. These obstacles might be eliminated by promoting an academic culture in the academic setting. Tannen (1998) suggests that in an academic setting, students should be trained to be able to offer constructive critiques. Constructive critique is an expression of different stance from another position which is intended to obtain shared, better results of analysis. It is put forth when there is a real, genuine difference in ideas and when it drives others to conduct new reading and/or research.

Constructive critique is expressed because there are real differences in opinions. It is not conveyed simply to put others in a weak position and make the speaker obtain a self-promotion. Constructive critique is not an attack directed to an established scholar, for example, to gain popularity. Constructive critique cannot be offered with many motivations, other than the search for truth, which drive the critic to pick a fight with another intellectual.

Constructive critique does not emerge from a habit of proving others wrong. This habit is an end in itself—it can be far less rewarding. This habit emerges from narrow vision and shallow thought that drive someone to easily find others’ fault but difficult to see their strengths. Offering a constructive critique is not criticizing. Criticizing is surely part of critical thinking, both are not synonymous. Criticizing makes the critics feel smart, which prevents them from learning from other parties. Dissimilar to this, constructive critique is an evaluation to someone’s work or opinion designed to convince him/her, to shake him/her out of her/his habitual mode of thought and lead them to a new insight.

Promoting constructive critique among the students does not mean that they are shaped into those having characteristics of western students and/or scholars who are individualistic, adversarial, horizontal, and critically-thinking (Stapleton, 2002). The tendency of the western scholars who are individualistic and adversarial is evaluated by Tannen (1998) as non constructive. It opens a big hole for those who are attacked and those who can not tolerate the atmosphere of critique. Tannen (1998: 266) illustrates the harsh of adversarial atmosphere experienced by Alice Kaplan, a professor of French at Duke University, as follows:

After the first speech, people started yelling at each other. “Are you suggesting that Celine was fascist!” “You call that evidence!” “I will not accept ignorance in the place of argument!” I was scared.

In the quotation, the fight starts when a person asking a question expressed in a high, accusing tone, marked with (!), as if expressing that what has been said by the previous speaker cannot be correct at all. Then, another person says, "You call that evidence!" to attack his interlocutor without giving any counter-evidence. The last quoted speech can be rephrased to, "Your statement shows that you do not understand the topic, I am the one who masters the topic under discussion. Therefore, I can put forth my argument. Thus, I cannot accept your words and leave my opinion." Thus, the expressions mentioned in the quotation above show that the speakers do not open themselves for a dialogue. They prefer to attack than to have a dialogue.

On the other way round, supporting constructive critiques among the students means that the students are encouraged to be able to understand, accept, and respect different stance with others. This is because 'without contraries is no progression' (William Blake in Tannen, 1998:272). In academic setting, students and/or scholars should be ready to have different ideas from others and to respect others' different stance.

Promoting constructive critiques suggests that students should use their logical thinking and reasoning more than their personal feelings. During the discussions, the students should open up their mind broader and control their emotion. Disagreements should be seen as something normal during discussion. Different stance is just the starting point toward innovation.

To develop the students' ability to respect different views from others', the students can be taught to understand and see different points since the earlier stages of education. The concept of multi truth during classroom discussion, as mentioned by Tia, one of the discussion participants, can be introduced to students. Since the elementary education, students can be taught to see various phenomena from different angles. This can motivate them to always try to search for innovation in their following education stages.

It should be borne in mind, however, that teaching students to be able to understand and prac-

tice the concept of multi truth does not mean to oblige them to always try to make others wrong. It is not like the classroom which is debate-oriented and agonistic as apparent in the next illustration (quoted from Tannen, 1998:265).

Student: "You see! This is how it should be, you are wrong!"

Teacher: "No! No! No! You are absolutely wrong in every respect! Just look at how you did this! Your solution has no base, as I just showed!"

Student: "You can't prove that. Mine works just as well!"

Teacher: "My God, if the world were full of technical idiots like yourself! Look again!"

In the illustration, the teacher encourages the adversarial situation in his class. Indeed, the student learns that he is wrong, but he also experiences the practice of arguing his points which is responded sarcastically by the teacher. Later, he will learn this way of responding to others' different argument. Of course, this is not what is wanted from the early training to develop constructive critiques among peers. Early training should be directed to make the students to be broad minded, to be open to new possibilities and new ideas without having a habit of attacking others. By bearing this in mind, the barriers for successful discussions stemmed from different cultural and personality factors could be eliminated.

CONCLUSION

The students' positive attitudes toward classroom discussions help them maximize their learning through sharing ideas with others. Some negative aspects arising from cultural and personal differences can be minimized by keeping in every discussion participants' mind the very aim of classroom discussions, that is, to obtain better, more refined understanding. A correct understanding of the concept of constructive critiques may also help them increase the benefit they can get from the discussions.

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