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## INTEGRATING LOCAL CULTURE INTO ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS

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### ABSTRACT

*English teachers very often question whether they have to only rely on the culture of the target language. Such confusion appears from their mind when they are involved in setting up the process of ELTL. Many English teachers assume that the culture of the target language should be the centre of ELTL as learning language cannot be separated from culture. As a result, English teachers overwhelmingly provide students with texts or dialogs derived from the English speaking countries which reflect native speakers' lives and behaviours. This somehow makes students difficult to understand the English materials as students have limited prior knowledge in lieu with the culture of the target language. Very often, the selected materials contradict to students' beliefs leading to students' unwillingness to study English. With regard to the above problem, this paper deals with promoting local culture in the process of English teaching and learning. It aims at encouraging English teachers to integrate the local culture into ELTL. Embedding students' local culture in ELTL is believed to facilitate students to gain the success for learning English. Added to this, having deep understanding of the local culture establishes the awareness of students' own local culture to be promoted in global communication.*

**Keywords:** *local culture, english language learning, global communication*

### ABSTRAK

*Guru-guru bahasa Inggris seringkali bertanya pada dirinya sendiri apakah mereka semata-mata harus berpijak pada budaya bahasa sasaran. Kebingungan ini tampak ketika mereka membahas proses pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Banyak guru bahasa Inggris berasumsi bahwa budaya bahasa sasaran seharusnya menjadi lebih diperhatikan karena pembelajaran bahasa tidak dapat dipisahkan dari budaya. Akibatnya, guru-guru bahasa Inggris seringkali menyediakan teks atau dialog yang didapatkan dari negara-negara yang bahasa aslinya adalah bahasa Inggris sehingga teks ini mampu merefleksikan perilaku dan kehidupan para penutur bahasa tersebut. Meskipun demikian, hal ini menyebabkan para siswa mengalami kesulitan untuk memahami materi-materi bahasa Inggris karena pengetahuan budaya bahasa sasaran mereka terbatas. Seringkali, pilihan materi berlawanan dengan keyakinan*

para siswa sehingga menyebabkan keengganan untuk belajar bahasa Inggris. Berkaitan dengan permasalahan tersebut, makalah ini membahas pengenalan budaya lokal dalam proses pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Hal tersebut dimaksudkan untuk mendorong guru-guru bahasa Inggris memadukan budaya lokal ke dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Mengenalkan budaya lokal para siswa diyakini memudahkan mereka mencapai keberhasilan dalam belajar bahasa Inggris. Selain itu, memiliki pemahaman yang mendalam budaya lokal mampu membangun kesadaran budaya lokal siswa untuk disebarluaskan dalam komunikasi global.

**Kata Kunci:** budaya lokal, pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, komunikasi global.

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, the Indonesian government via the education department has been applying the school-based curriculum (abbreviated as SBC) or well-known as *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP)*. This curriculum is applied from elementary school level to secondary school one. This curriculum is aimed at facilitating students to maximally develop their competencies with regard to students' characteristics. It is developed by each school concerned according local potentiality and students' competencies in reference to the educational national standard referring to eight standards two of which are the standard of content and of the graduate competencies (*Undang Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor: 20, 2003*).

To underlie the development of the curriculum, seven principals are made. First, the curriculum is developed on the basis of student needs aimed at developing students' capacity and potentiality with regard to their environment. Second, the SBC should be various and integrated in nature coping with student cultural backgrounds, the potential of school environment, and the level of education concerned. Third, the SBC enables students to access the development of current sciences, technology and art. Fourth, the SBC should be relevant to society demands. Fifth, it is developed on the basis of the comprehensiveness and continuity. Sixth, the SBC refers

to life-long education. Seventh, the SBC articulates the balance of national and local needs and demands.

In reference to the nature of the SBC, the process of English language teaching and learning (ELTL) should be based on the mentioned principles. This implies that English teachers of any level should be concerned with students' characteristics when they are involved in carrying out the process of English language teaching and learning which include (1) preparing the lesson plan, (2) selecting and developing teaching materials, media, assessment, methods, etc, (3) implementing the teaching and learning process, (4) managing teaching and learning, (5) conducting assessments, and the like. Added to this, English teachers have to develop the potentiality of students and their local culture on the grounds that this may facilitate students to maximally acquire the target language. However, confusion appears on the part of teachers questioning whether they should articulate the culture of the target language (TL) or the local culture. Turkan and Celik (2003) state that the integration of the culture of the target language in English language teaching and learning is believed to facilitate students to flexibly and wisely perform along the ranks of cultural norms that they come across within the target language culture. This implies that English teachers are fostered to integrate the TL culture in their teaching in order that students can minimize the cultural shock

when they engage with English native speakers. However, as far as the writer concerns, the process of English language teaching should not exclusively articulate the TL culture. This suggests that the local culture of students should be promoted to be incorporated in the process of English language teaching and learning on the grounds that it triggers students to be aware of their own local culture and equips them to popularize the local culture with the use of English. Such a statement is in line with the establishment of the SBC implemented in the level of elementary and secondary schools giving an emphasis on the integration of the local culture in the process of teaching and learning in all subjects including an English subject. This aims at promoting students' awareness of being familiar with and proud of their own local culture that triggers them to widely promote to global societies. Added to this, the embedment of the local culture can prevent the claim practices conducted by other countries which have the same historical backgrounds as it has recently happened.

With regard to the embedment of the local culture as discussed above, this paper then presents the issue of how to integrate the local culture into the process of English language teaching and learning. There are four main issues discussed in this paper. They include the nature of culture, culture embedded in English language teaching, the reasons for the embedment of the local culture in ELTL, and how to integrate the local culture into ELTL. To end up the discussion, conclusions are made.

## **2. Discussion**

### **2.1 The Notion of Culture**

The notion of culture is defined differently by a great number of experts as they have their own perspectives. In a broad sense, culture refers to what people believe, what people think, what people create, and the like. In a narrow sense, culture means an identifiable group with shared beliefs and experiences,

feeling of worth and value embedded in the experience and shared interest in a common historical background (Brislin, 1998:2). Trompenaars (1998:6) defines culture as 'the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas'. More comprehensive definition is presented by Jandt (2003: 6) who states that culture refers to the totality of thoughts, experiences, a pattern of behaviours and its concept values, and assumptions about life that direct behaviours and how those evolve with contact with the other culture. Jandt (2003) further states that culture can be defined as a process of social transmission of people thoughts and behaviours learned from birth in the family and schools over the course of generations.

Adaskou et al. (1990) define culture in four dimensions which include aesthetic, sociological, semantic, and pragmatic sense. The four dimensions confer a concrete substance to the abstractness of culture. In aesthetic sense, culture refers to what people create in the form of media, cinema, music, literature, and the like. In sociological sense, culture is defined as the organization and nature of family, of home life, of interpersonal relations, material conditions, work and leisure, customs and institution. In semantic sense, it means a conceptual system embodied in the language, conditioning all our perceptions and our thought processes, time and space relations, emotional states, and colours. In pragmatic sense culture is defined as the background knowledge, social skills, and paralinguistic skills that lead to the success of communication that embodies (1) the ability of using appropriate exponents of the various communicative functions, (2) the ability of adjusting norms of politeness, which is to some extent different from learners' taboo avoidance, (3) awareness of conventions governing interpersonal relations, questions of status, obligations, license, and (4) being familiarity with the main rhetorical conventions in different written

genres for example different types of letters and messages, form-filling, advertisements, and the like.

The definition of culture proposed by Adaskou et al. (1990) defining culture in four dimensions which include aesthetic, sociological, semantic, and pragmatic sense seems to be more comprehensive compared to the other definitions. Also, their definition is accommodative to embody the types of culture found in societal life. For such a reason, this paper utilizes it as a working definition.

In terms of the types of culture, Appelbaum (1997) proposes two aspects of human culture, namely material culture and non-material culture. Material culture concerns 'all physical objects made by the members of a particular society to assist in shaping their lives'. They include technological devices, goods consumed, the place of worship, types of cuisine, offices, stores, vehicles, and the like. Non-material culture deals with the ideas shared by people in a particular society which includes language, values, beliefs, customs, habits, rules, conventions, institutions, organizations, and others. Such types of culture have to be taken into account when English language teachers carry out the process of English language teaching and learning.

More specifically, Hofstede in Jandt (2003) states that culture can be classified as four categories such as symbols, rituals, values, and heroes. Symbols deal with verbal and non verbal language. Rituals refer to the collectively fundamental collective activities within culture. Values are concerned with people's perception on particular objects or behaviours with the use of two parameters such as good or bad, beautiful or ugly, normal or abnormal, and other which are present in society. Heroes are the real or imaginary people who serve as behaviour models within culture. Further, he proposes some elements of culture which include language and gesture, personal appearance and social relationship, religion,

philosophy, values, courtship, marriage, family customs, food and recreation, work and government, education and communication systems, health, transportation, government systems, and economic systems. All these cultural elements are learned through interaction with others in the culture.

## **2.2 Culture Embedded in English Language Teaching**

As reviewed previously, there is a doubt which is encountered by English teachers to deal with the culture targeted in English language teaching. Many experts (Guest, 2002; McKay, 2002; Littlewood, 2000) give an emphasis on the culture of the target language as manifested in use of the teaching methodology and teaching materials. This is based on the idea that teaching language cannot be separated from the culture on the grounds that both culture and language are interrelated. Brown (2000) states: 'Language and culture are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture'. This implies that culture is automatically embedded in the language which is learned. Therefore, the English teachers have to exclusively impose the culture of the target language in the process of English teaching and learning process in order that a comprehensive understanding can be gained.

In support of the above statement, Kirl (2001) claims that the relationship between language and culture is identical with the relationship between nature and nurture. The latter shows that how language functionally works and what status a language holds in society. This implies that target language learners have to intensely taken into account the cultural content of the target language in order that they can minimize communication breakdown when they communicate with native speakers. Samovar et al. cited in Lessard-Clouston (1997) urge that culture and communication are not sepa-

able because culture does not only perform who talks to whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds, but it also assists speakers to determine the ways people encode messages, the meanings that they have for messages, and the conditions or circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted. In short, culture becomes the foundation of communication.

To deal with English language teaching and learning, English teachers are encouraged to give an emphasis on intercultural understanding which means that learners are exposed to the culture of English as this can be used to minimize social and psychological distance which, to some extent, hinders the success of English language acquisition (Schulman in Ellis, 2003). Social distance means the equality of the social status of each culture, while psychological distance refers to learners' psychological aspects as manifested in language and cultural shock, motivation and ego boundaries. Both influence learners' attitude which directly or indirectly facilitates learners to acquire the target language.

Referring to the above discussion, the writer believes that it is important to incorporate the TL culture in English language teaching and learning as both are inseparable in nature. This is based on the theory that English language learners seem to maximally acquire the target language if they are able to do with acculturation - a process of becoming adapted to new culture. This implies that the learning of a target language requires cultural as well as linguistic competence since all languages live within cultural contexts. In this case, learners must acquire not only the lexis and syntax of this language, but also concomitant abilities required to utilize these elements in culturally appropriate ways during TL communication (Culhane, 2002).

To deal with the embedment of the TL culture, the English teachers, however, have

to be aware that learners are not empty vessels having no predispositions toward the world. They come to the class with abundance of culture acquired from their physical and social environments. They are individuals who are uniquely framed with their own cultural schemas as part of society members. This means that learners' local cultural aspects have to be taken into account in the process of English language teaching and learning on the grounds that the learners' cultural schemas determine the success for acquiring the TL. Byram (1991) warns that the exclusive concern on the TL culture is believed to be misleading as learners have developed their own concepts, beliefs, behaviours, and the like. Lantolf (1999) states that maintaining two of the possibly culturally constructed artifacts makes use of organizing their mental lives. In conclusion, learners' local cultural aspects have to be embedded in the process of English language teaching and learning.

### **2.3 The Reasons for the Embedment of the Local Culture in ELTL**

As previously mentioned in the school-based curriculum, learners' local culture is given a role to take a play in a series of English language teaching and learning as it can facilitate them to acquire the TL. Post and Rathet (1996) claim that students' familiarity toward the content of the targeted texts in reference to their prior experience achieved in their daily lives influences their comprehension of the TL. In other words, content familiarity assists students to make sense of the lessons and validate the sense with the utilization of their own framework (Jenkins (1999). In support of this claim, Renner (1994) states that if the language teaching and learning are corroborated with the experience of learners' lives, it will be much more meaningful. In other words, the local culture that students have is believed to be one of the significant factors to influence the success for acquiring the target language. The local cul-

ture embodies any language and gesture, personal appearance and social relationship, religion, philosophy, values, courtship, marriage, family customs, food and recreation, work and government, education and communication systems, health, transportation, government systems, and economic systems which exist in part of regional societies in Indonesia such as Javanese society, Balinese, Sundanese, and others.

The underlying interest of embedding the local culture in ELTL is the existence of non-native varieties of English such as Singaporean English, Malaysian English, Indonesian English, Indian English, and others which are linguistically and socio-linguistically divergent. Such English varieties commonly called *World Englishes* appear as a great number of people attempt to redefine the existence of English as the international language. English should not be claimed by people in Australia, America, Canada or England as English now belongs to all countries in the world. Therefore, in English language teaching, English teachers do not need to exclusively impose the culture of the inner circle countries, but also to both the outer circle and the extending circle of countries (McKay, 2002).

The need for popularizing the local culture is also motivated by the globalization era which enables people from different countries to travel from one country to another country for many different purposes such as business, vacation, work, study, and others. This, of course, drives every country in the world including Indonesia to be intensely concerned about the popularization of the local culture to many parties. To do so, the Indonesian government has been making some efforts, one of which is embedding the local culture in some levels of education as manifested in the school-based curriculum. Kirkpatrick (2006) suggests that ELTL in Indonesia includes not only the TL culture but also local culture. He adds that regional culture (ASIAN culture) should be also embedded in ELTL.

#### 2.4 How to Integrate the Local Culture into ELTL

Several theories and arguments have been put forth to justify that local culture is encouraged to be incorporated in English language teaching and learning on the grounds that the integration of the local culture into ELTL may facilitate learners to cope with possible problems that exist in intercultural communication requiring the ability of intercultural competence to deal with understanding the TL culture and establishing learners' self-identity in the process of cross-cultural mediation. Byram (1991) states that in foreign language teaching and learning learners serve 'comparative ethnographers' in the sense that learners engage in two cultural perspectives which can establish cultural awareness. This implies that there is no doubt anymore for English teachers to incorporate the local culture in their teaching.

The incorporation of learners' local culture can be conducted in many ways. For example, English teachers can incorporate local culture in some teaching activities which include selecting topics used in the classroom discussions, selecting or developing English materials, designing tasks or projects, designing media, developing tests, and others. The issue of selecting topics of texts about the local culture as interesting as possible is imperative. When English teachers deal with presenting procedure texts, they may start from local cuisine such as how to make *gado-gado*, *opor ayam*, *gudeg*, or *bebek goreng*, depending on where students live, before they present how make a hamburger, sandwich, or hotdog. In presenting narrative texts, English teachers may discuss some local narrative texts, for example, *Loro Jonggrang*, *Nyi Loro Kidul*, *Sang-kuriang*, and the like before they deal with *Cinderella*. English teachers can deal with describing *Monumen Yogya Kembali*, *Borobudur*, or *Istana Bogor*, before they describe Opera House in Sidney or White House in America. Such topics of local culture are very

important for students to facilitate them to learn the TL culture.

When English teachers or text-book authors deal with developing materials, they have to take into account some topics of local culture such as *becak*, *kereta kuda*, etc (transportation), *dangdut*, *keroncong*, *campur sari* (music), *batik*, *sarung*, etc (cloths), *wayang*, *kethoprak*, *jaipong*, etc (art), Javanese wedding party, *Syawalan*, etc (ceremony). They have to include such topics in combination with the topics derived from the TL culture. Added to this, the situations used in text-books should embody three settings, namely the extending circle, outer circle, and inner circle countries. The use of characters in text-books should not be dominated with western names. The local names of the characters should be proportionally used depending on the contexts.

In developing media, English teachers have to pay attention on the cultural contexts that learners engage in. It seems inappropriate to use a dog as one of the animal pet media in Islamic schools as it is improper for Moslems to breed dogs. Task or project development should be contextualized with regard to learners' environments. For example, English teachers would not assign learners living in remote areas to interview English native speakers. In developing tests, English teachers should also make a proportional arrangement of the texts used in the test including the conversational settings.

### **3. Conclusion**

In reference to the above discussion, English teachers are encouraged to incorpo-

rate the local culture in teaching English as learners come to the class with relatively sufficient vessels of their own culture. By integrating the local culture into English teaching and learning process, it is believed that learners would have inter-cultural awareness that facilitates them to cope with intercultural communication barriers. English teachers are driven to create a classroom atmosphere by making a balance discussion on the local culture and target language culture. Language learners are encouraged to achieve intercultural competence which is very important to engage in multi-cultural contexts and to preserve their self-cultural identity.

In lieu with the interest for integrating the local culture into English language teaching, English teachers can conduct some ways which include selecting topics used in the classroom discussions, selecting or developing English materials, designing tasks or projects, designing media, developing tests, and others. The use of local characters, places, and issues as the content for English text-books is subtly interspersed with the cultural contexts of inner circle English-speaking countries.

The embedment of local culture in the process of English language teaching and learning aims at promoting students' awareness of being familiar with and proud of their own local culture that triggers them to widely promote to global societies. Added to this, the embedment of the local culture can prevent the claim practices conducted by other countries which have the same historical backgrounds as it has recently happened.

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