

TEACHING ENGLISH AND THE GLOBAL CHALLENGES: MAINTAINING THE NATION IDENTITY

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Abstract

It is widely believed that English plays the most significant role to enable people actively involved in the global communication. While at the same time, the practice of foreign language teaching will not be possibly carried out without discussing the accompanied culture. This may not be beneficial concerning the nation culture. Students may internalize the cultural norms and values of the foreign culture in their life which may be different from their own cultural values and norms. Therefore, it is necessary to have a closer look on the practice of English Language teaching in this country. This particular discussion, tries to explore the current practice of English Language Teaching in this country and to find out whether this current practice of ELT is in line with the national goals of education as well as is capable to face the global challenges.

Keywords: *teaching, English, global challenge, maintaining, nation Identity.*

Introduction

It is commonly believed that mastering English may become one of the requirements to be able to communicate with other people from other countries, as English has merely been becoming one of the important International languages. This language has been used either as the second or foreign language in many countries not to mention this country, Indonesia.

English has become one of the compulsory subjects in Indonesian schools beginning from the junior high school to universities. Considering the need to learn this language in earlier time, has put English as one of the subjects to be taught in earlier education levels (elementary schools, and even kindergarten) in some areas of this country as one of the local contents or additional subject. This

fact shows the need to master English has been becoming one of the main concerns of people in this country, not only the government but even from parents, and society in general.

Unfortunately, this deep concern has not yet accompanied by the understanding of the possible foreign cultural contents accompanying the teaching of this foreign language. Therefore, it is considered an important thing that educators and all individuals involving in the practice of a foreign language teaching need to have awareness and sensitivity regarding issues of cultural diversity between English and the local languages as well as the national language, bahasa Indonesia owing to the fact that not all foreign cultural values and beliefs are in line with our national cultural values and beliefs.

This particular discussion focusses on identifying the relationship between education and nation identity, and having a closer look on the current practice of English Language Teaching in this country, and also its significances in maintaining the nation identity.

Discussion

1. Education and the Nation Identity

Dewey (1938) defines education as a complex human experience of individual growth and development, a process encountered in everyday life (Dewey, 1938 in Rury, 2005: 4). In addition, Rury (2005: 4) also mentions that in other respects education is also the social and institutional activity of transmitting knowledge and values from one generation to the next, a process involving large segments of society.

Meanwhile, Nucci and Narvaéz (2008:5) state that education may also be defined in terms of practices that schools and teachers use to influence student learning and development although children's and adolescents' moral development and character formation are not simply the result of schooling but this is widespread agreement that schools should contribute to students' moral development and character formation.

These definitions of education present the importance of education as a process or a set practices of transmitting the knowledge and values to the next generation. In the Indonesian context, the term education has also been explicitly stated in the Act of *Republic Indonesia on National Educational System* that may be considered as,

....conscious and well planned effort in creating a learning environment and learning process so that learners will be able to develop their full potential for acquiring spiritual and religious strengths, develop self-control, personality, intelligence, morals and noble character and skills that one needs for him/herself, for the community, for the nation, and for the State. National education means education based on *Pancasila* and the 1945 Constitution, and is rooted in the religious values, national cultures of Indonesia, and one that is responsive to the needs of the ever-changing era. (Act Of Republic Indonesia on National Educational System (Chapter 1 Article 1 and 2).

From this definition, it is widely believed that the main goal of our country Indonesia education lays primarily on preparing highly qualified human resources having good understanding and beliefs on the religious values, national cultures of Indonesia, and being responsive to the needs of the ever-changing era. It is through education, that this nation identity could be defined. Education is believed to plays a significant role in determining people beliefs and understanding. It is

through our schools that we know how to write or read information from books or other resources. It is through our parents guidance, examples, and explanation that we know how to behave politely in our society as culture, especially religious and ethnic values, is not inherited but it is learned through sets of practices (Nieto, 2010: 144). This beliefs and understanding will become our individual culture that lead to our community's culture and finally becomes our national culture. It is this national culture that forms the national identity as what has been stated by Smith (1991: 11) that national identity could be seen as cultural communities, whose members were unified, if not made homogeneous, by common historical memories, myths, symbols, and traditions.

Smith (1991: 14) also mentions that a nation can be defined as a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members. Therefore, national identity is fundamentally multi-dimensional: it can never be reduced to a single element, even by particular factions of nationalists, nor can it be easily or swiftly induced in a population by artificial means.

This definition, in fact, is in line with our national goal of education stated in the *Undang Undang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional 2003, pasal 3*, that:

Pendidikan Nasional berfungsi mengembangkan kemampuan dan membentuk watak serta peradaban bangsa yang bermartabat dalam rangka mencerdaskan kehidupan bangsa, bertujuan untuk berkembangnya potensi peserta didik agar menjadi manusia yang beriman dan bertakwa kepada Tuhan Yang Maha Esa, berakhlak mulia, sehat, berilmu, cakap,

kreatif, mandiri, dan menjadi warga negara yang demokratis serta bertanggung jawab.

In short, it can be said that it is through education that the national identity could be created as education aims at preparing the next generations having the similar perspectives in terms of religious values, national cultural values as the previous generations and maintaining the nation identity.

Hence, it seems very important to pay great attention to the practices of our educational system in our country, considering the fact that it would be impossible to reach the goals of our national educational system without involving all aspects determining the success of educational practices for the sake of providing better generation in the future who can maintain religious, and national cultural values of this country and at the same time remain actively responsive to the needs of the ever changing era. Those are parents, schools' elements (not to mention: teachers, students, facilities, etc), and also the government.

The following discussion deals with the practice of one of the compulsory subjects in our schools, that is, English, which commonly believed to be one of the important foreign languages to be learnt by our students in schools starting from junior high school level to university level. It is widely believed that language is part of culture. It is commonly believed that when a person learning a foreign language at the same time he/she also learns its accompanying culture. Brown via Richards and Renandya (2002:12) claims that, "*whenever you teach a language, you also teach a complex system of cultural customs, values, and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting*".

2. English Language Teaching and the Global Challenges

In line with the practice of other subjects in schools, the practice of English language teaching in in this country is also based on the national curriculum, stated in the *Standar Kompetensi Lulusan*, that is mainly divided in terms of the four language skills Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking. For senior high school students, for example, the practice of English Language Teaching in general aims at providing the learners to be able to understand and express meaning in written and spoken in terms of interpersonal and transactional discourses formally or informally in the form of *recount, narrative, procedure, descriptive, news item, report, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, spoof, explanation, discussion, dan review*, in their daily life contexts (*Permen 23 tahun 2006 tentang SKL*). In other words, the main goal of the English Language teaching in this country is in preparing the learners to be able to communicate effectively by using the language.

It is this curriculum which creates the basis of the current practice of English language teaching in this country. All of individuals involving in teaching English need to consider this curriculum in conducting the teaching. They need to put this general goals into practice by providing suitable materials and using appropriate strategies and methods of teaching English to their students. Book writers and material developers need also to consider what is mentioned in the current curriculum in preparing the books and materials to their target market.

In terms of the teachers, they have played a very significant roles in reaching this goals of English Language Teaching in this country. Most English teachers have done a great job in selecting and adapting materials that facilitate their learners opportunities to practice using the language. They also have been trying hard to select the best strategies of teaching the language. In selecting the materials and teaching strategies they need to consider their learners and also the objectives of their particular learning. They also need to provide learning setting that enable their learners to use to get the right context of situation. It is of course not an easy things to do, since these teachers need to teach the language and the same time they need to introduce other or I may say as foreign culture to their students. This fact is due to the fact that English is considered as one of the important international languages that is badly needed in order to actively participate in the global communication.

In line with this, Stevenson, (in Tilbury, Daniella, etc (eds), 2002: 187) mentions that educators need to address the global challenges of building sustainable communities and societies. What it meant by the term 'global challenge' is closely related to the fundamental challenge that we have in this current era or what commonly mentioned as the globalization era, that is, the era or period where all human beings can live decently with dignity and grace (Blim, 2005: 14).

In terms of the materials used in the classroom, many publishers and book writers have done well in providing materials to facilitate the learning. Most of them have done great jobs in presenting the materials in order to enable the

learners to practice using the language either in written or spoken discourse. In presenting certain language expressions, for example, they commonly have completed the explanation with the situations in which these expression commonly used.

Above all, it is widely believed that the current practice of English language teaching in this country has been considered almost all aspects needed in preparing opportunities to the learners to understand and practice using the language in the global communication and face the global challenges. Then what may be the next important questions to bear in our mind, are whether the current practice of English language teaching in line with the national goals of education and at the same time whether it can be one of the ways in maintaining the nation identity.

3. The Significances of ELT Practices in Maintaining the Nation Identity

As mentioned previously that the current practice of English language teaching has considered all all aspects needed in preparing opportunities to learners to understand and practice using the language in the global communication. Considering the goals of national education, it seems that the current practice of English language teaching miss the important aspect of foreign language teaching. The one that is commonly called ‘cultural awareness’. Tanaka (2006: 37) mentions that “the concept of ‘cultural awareness’—understanding of different cultures—has been emphasized as an essential part of English learning and teaching”.

The concept of ‘cultural awareness’—understanding of different cultures—needs to be emphasized as an essential part of English learning and teaching. In fact, the phrase ‘cross-cultural communication’ is on the lips of English teachers. Every teacher believes that learning a second language necessarily accompanies understanding a different culture (Nieto, 2002). It is generally agreed so far that language cannot be separated from culture. Following Linton (1945) via Rajend Mesthrie, Joan Swann, Ana Deumer and William L. Leap, culture can be defined as in the technical sociological anthropological sense. The culture of a society refers to, ‘the way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation’. Culture in this sense is a ‘design for living’, which defines appropriate or acceptable ways and forms of behavior within particular societies (Mesthrie, et al, 2009: 28). While language can be considered as a cultural activity and, at the same time, an instrument for organizing other cultural domains (Sharifian and Palmer, 2007: 1). It is clearly seen that learning a foreign language can be separated from learning its culture since language is part of its culture. Following what mentioned by Foley (2001: 19) that:

Language is often treated theoretically as a sub system of culture within cognitive anthropology but in practice and structure of language as revealed by modern linguistics has generally served as the paradigm for analyzing other aspects of culture.

Therefore, all English teachers need to consider the importance of having cultural awareness before they teach the language. They need to realize that in the practice of English language teaching, they are going not only teaching the language but at the same time teaching its culture. Therefore, in presenting the

materials, for example, sometimes or even most of the time they need to reconsider whether the materials contain cultural content or not and whenever necessary give additional explanations to their students as they find those which are not in line with the national cultural values or norms, or showing some patterns of behaviours which are not acceptable in our national cultural context. Teachers need to be very careful in choosing the textbooks considering that textbooks can be seen as the source of input for their students in learning a language. Richards and Schmidt (2002: 550) states that *text book* can be considered as:

A book on a specific subject used as a teaching learning guide, especially in a school or college. Textbooks for foreign language learning are often part of a graded series covering multiple skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking, grammar) or deal with a single skill (e.g. reading).

The following are some examples of materials taken from one English textbook for junior high school. I and some of my colleagues have got these pictures during my previous studies on our researchers on cultural content in junior high school textbooks in DIY.



Figure 1. Picture Showing the Western Cultural Behaviour of a Family Having Breakfast.
(Taken from Nina Bates, 2007: 16)

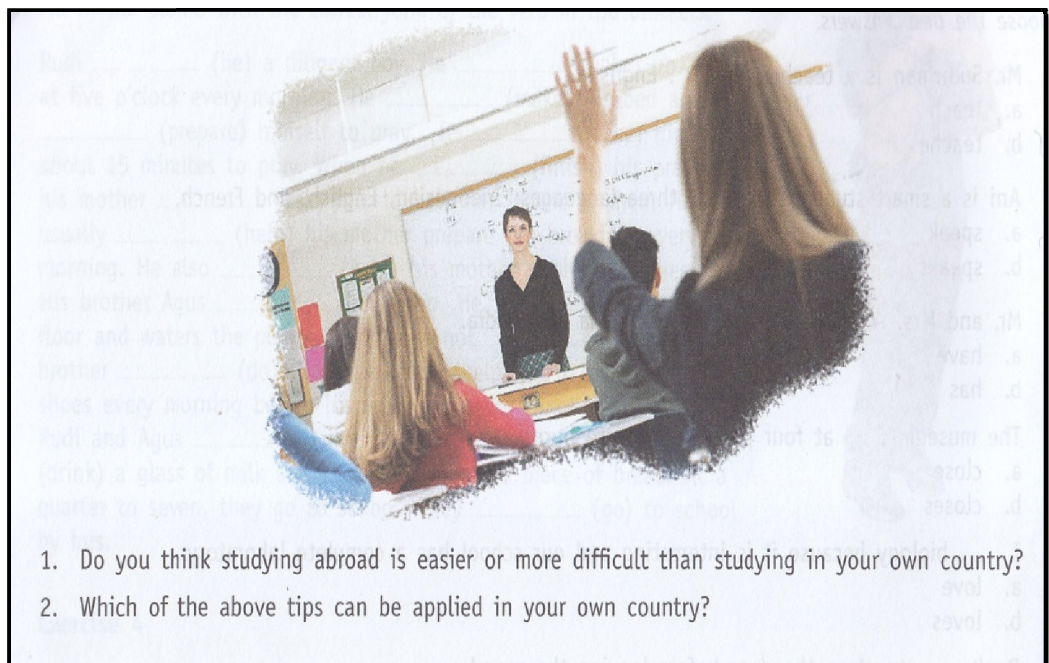


Figure 2. A Picture Showing a Classroom Situation.
(Taken from Nina Bates, 2007: 34)

These two pictures present western behaviours which may not be similar or even acceptable in our cultural context. The first picture, for example, showing a family breakfast, in which some of two women wearing pajamas. This particular pattern of behaviour may not be easily found in our cultural setting. Not all people in this country would use pajamas to have breakfast with their family. It is also through this picture that it is easily recognized the kinds of food that a Western family commonly for breakfast. This kind of picture may influence readers, in this sense, students, to have a new perspective on the term 'breakfast'. Then, in the second picture, it shows a classroom situation, in which there is a teacher and some of her students. In that picture, it is clearly seen that all of the students are not wearing a school uniform and there is a student who raise her left hand as she wants to ask question to the teacher. Once again, this kind of pattern of behaviour may not be found in our junior high school classrooms. Therefore, teacher need to give additional explanation to their students as they want to present these pictures. Then the next picture, Picture 3 is also taken from the same book as the other two. It also shows one of the western pattern of behaviour that it is fine to accept a return money or change by using the left hand, which may not be acceptable in our cultural context.

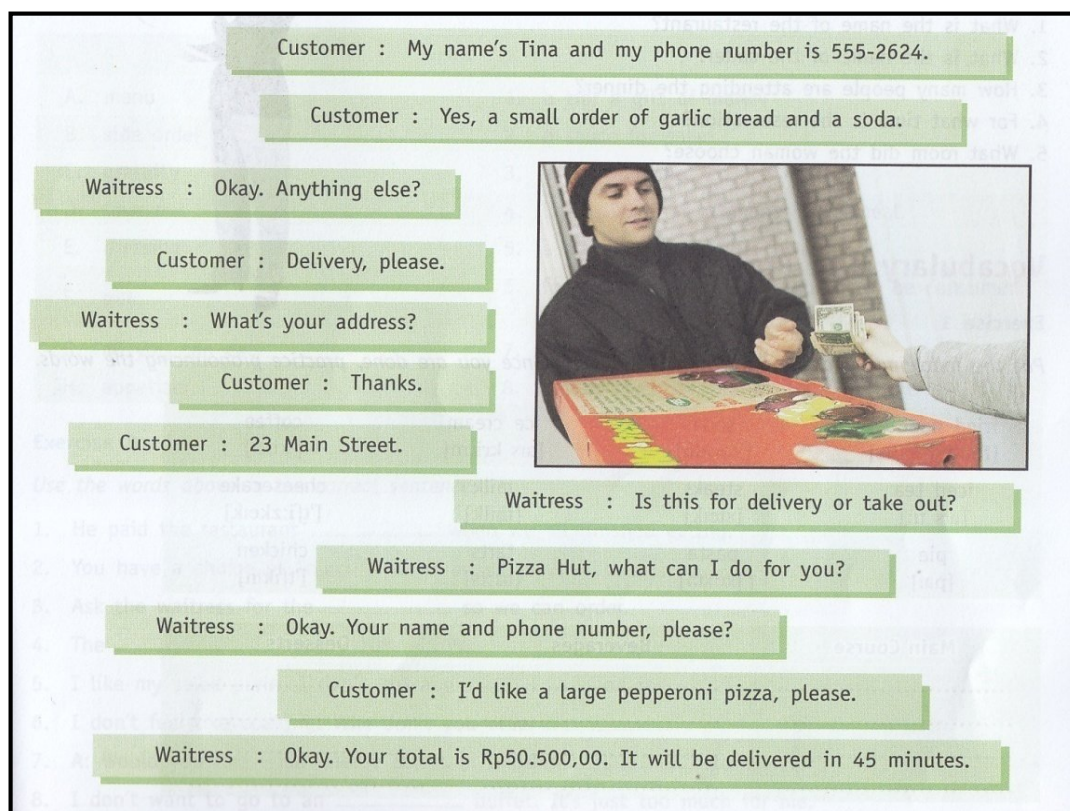


Figure 3. A Picture Showing a Man Receives Return Money by His Left Hand.
(Taken from Nina Bates, 2007: 115)

These pictures are only some of the cultural content explicitly presented in an English textbooks for junior high school. Our previous study has found that the cultural content may be explicitly presented like these and some others are presented implicitly through activities or exercises in the textbooks either in the form texts or pictures. Therefore, once again, it would be a very big and important job for all English teachers and all individual as well as other relevant parties to pay attention on the insertion of foreign cultural content accompanying their teaching. Consequently, having a very good cultural awareness of the 'English' cultural norms and values as well as the spirit to maintain the national cultural

norms and values is a must for all English teachers and those involving the practice of English language teaching in this country.

Conclusion

It is widely believed that education plays the significant roles in preparing better generation for the country. It is through education that people may get much more knowledge as well as understanding on certain subjects. It is also from education that people are expected to get certain values and norms as they are believed by their ancestors since education may also be considered as practices of transmitting knowledge to the next generations. It is through education that it is expected the nation identity can be created as well as maintained.

In terms of the current practice of English language teaching, it is commonly believed that this kind of educational practices are intended to prepare the learners to be able to actively communicate by using the language and face the global challenge of this globalization era. Considering the fact, that in every foreign language learning there must be a process of learning other culture, this process may lead the students to have better understanding on foreign culture and even could make them internalize the norms as well as foreign cultural values in their daily lives. All individuals engage in the foreign language teaching and learning process need to anticipate this by having the cultural awareness of the foreign culture and start having discussion on the national culture while explaining the foreign culture in their classrooms.

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