

English in Economy World: An Overview of English Learning

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Abstract

English is not a language for the English-speaking countries anymore. English has spread worldwide to the countries in the five continents. One of the reasons is economy. People need to acquire English since it is one way to cope with the communication in economy trend. English is needed to process information, analyze, evaluate, experiment, negotiate and collaborate in economy. The awareness of English importance in the globalization era has made people learn this universal language consciously and it brings issues to English language learning especially in non-English-speaking countries.

A. Introduction

Today is the era after Modern English that is called as ‘Global English’ in which English has new status as a global lingua franca and it brings consequences that English is surrounded by new cultural, linguistic, political and economic issues (Graddol 2006:58). The use of English has spread across the globe. English is not dominated by certain countries, but it now belongs to more countries. Thereby, learning English is considered more and more important in life. Recently, people do not learn it only in formal schools but also non-formal educational institutions. In formal education, students start to learn English younger. It is not taught in secondary school anymore but started to be taught at primary school, even pre-school (Graddol, 2006:88). Thus, it urges the need to study the English language learning.

This article is an attempt to answer some questions such as *Why do people learn English?*; *How is English in Economy Trend?*; *What is English language learning?*;

B. Why do People Learn English?

1. English in General

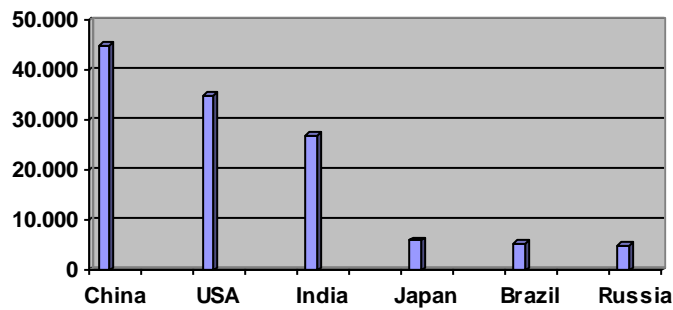
English is used worldwide regardless their native languages. It is an international resource. It is there in everyday life ranging from technology, science and education to commerce, advertising, and pop. English is used to translate manuals, instructions, traffic signs, and many others (Pope 2002:19; Brown 2001:118; Richard). As stated further by Pope, around a third of the world's population is routinely exposed to some versions of English (Pope 2002:19). In addition, around 400 million people use English as the first language and 700 million people use English as second or foreign language (<http://www.britishcouncil.com>). It implies that if people want to move ahead as the world moves and to communicate with other people all over the world, they need to learn English.

The need to learn English depends on the learners' background. The learners whose mother tongue is English need to learn English because they need to know the knowledge of the language. The non-native speakers who belong to the countries where English is spoken as second language learn English because it is a part of their curriculum and they have to use it formally. For example, Malaysians learn English because it is a compulsory subject, proficiency in English opens the door to greater opportunities for further education, English is the language of international communication, the ability to speak English is a status symbol and English is the lingua franca among the middle class, especially in large town and cities (Cittravellu et al. 2002:4). The non-native learners, especially immigrants,

have different reasons. Among other, they need to learn English to acquire the English skills needed to thrive in a new culture and to achieve communicative competence (Graddol, 2006:118). According to Graddol, immigrants to English-speaking countries need to learn the language of their host society since they live and work there. However, the non-native learners who do not live in an English-speaking country have different reasons. They need English to get a job. Many job vacancies offer opportunity for the job seekers who are able to use English, even many require the job applicants to attach English test certificate like TOEFL with certain score in their application letter.

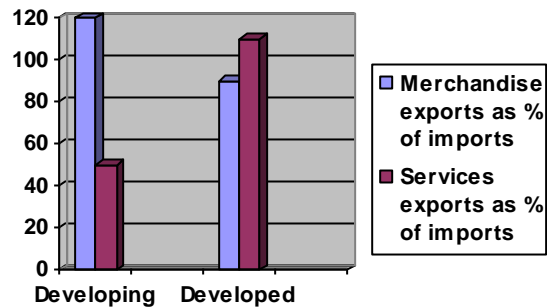
2. English in Economy Trend

Because of the globalization, English is important to learn since it can provide information access to the world of science and technology as the country seeks modernization and economic growth. It follows that we need to understand fully the economic changes that have prompted the advancement of English instruction. With rapid economic growth, the role of English has been growing in importance. Developing countries in the past have been dependent on its abundant supply of manpower in labor-intensive industries and the level of English required has been quite low. Time has changed now since many countries are on the turning point of the development into the kind of economy that depends more on skill-intensive industries. At this point, a steady supply of skilled manpower and technical know-how becomes a necessity. The skills of information processing, analyzing, evaluating, experimenting, negotiating, and collaborating needed are applied in English context. It is also where English as a global language becomes increasingly necessary.

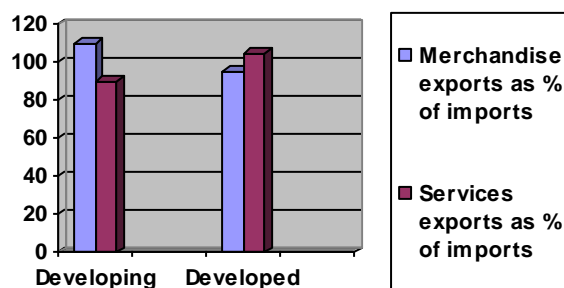


1.1 How the top six economies will look in 2050 (in Graddol)

The chart above shows that China could overtake the USA to become the largest exporter in the world. We can also see that some non-English-speaking countries are in front of the economic rise than other English-speaking countries. Since economy covering many countries to interact to each other, English as a universal language is needed. To solve communication problems between people doing business from different countries, English is believed to be a means of effective and efficient communication.



1980



2002

1.2 The comparison of the merchandise and services exports in developing and developed countries in 1980 and 2002 (in Graddol).

The first chart above compares the export of merchandise and services between developing countries, usually refer to non native speaker countries, and developed countries, native speaker ones in 1980. The comparison in 2002 is shown in the second chart. We can see there that trade in services is becoming more evenly distributed as developing countries increase their export of services. Services are of linguistic interest since they require much higher levels of communication than manufacturing. Exported services often require international communication (Graddol, 2006). Here, English plays its role as a language of global.

C. What Is English Language Learning and How Do People Learn It?

To discuss English language learning as a whole, it is necessary to give the definitions of the key words. First of all, the term 'language' needs to be explained. According to Pope (2002: 55-6), we use language to interact in a wide range of social situations and material context, to share information, to converse with the rest of the world and to perform a range of functions. The next, come the definition of 'English language'. One of them can be referred from (Encarta, 2007). Here, English is defined as:

- A mother tongue: the first language somebody learns as a child at home.
- A second language: a language learned by somebody after the first language he or she learns at home.
- A lingua franca: a language or mixture of languages used for communication by people who speak different first languages.

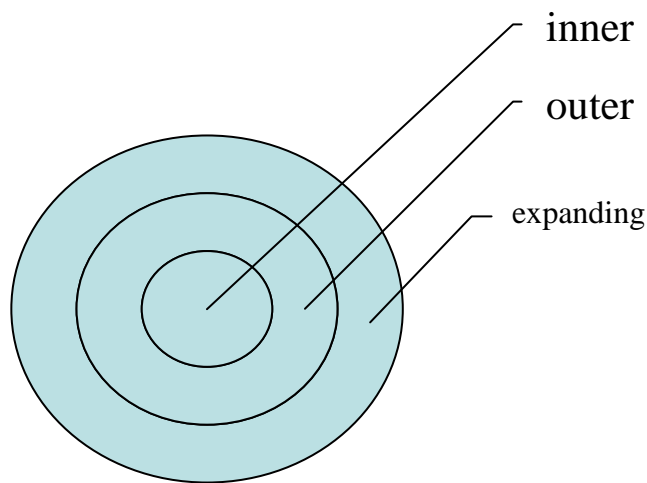
Jenkins (2006:161), however, defines English as Lingua Franca (ELF) in a different way. According to Jenkins, EFL is the language used in communication with native English speakers. It is on the contrary to the traditional and more recent definitions which define ELF as English learned by a community where it is not an official language of communication (McArthur, 1992; Richards, Platt&Weber, 1985; Stevens, 1997; Thornbury, 2006, in Prodromou 2006:411).

Today, since English is spoken by more and more countries in the world, it is also called as world language (Graddol, 2006 see also Brumfit, 2001) which means “belongs to everybody who speaks it, but it is nobody’s mother tongue.”

The next key term to be defined is ‘learning’, which becomes an important part of the discussion on the Study of English Language Learning. As Brown stated (1987:6) that learning is acquiring active, conscious focus on and acting upon events outside and inside and retention of information or skill through practice resulting in the change of behavior. The obvious proof that someone has learnt something is on the change of behavior as a form of application. The similar idea was proposed by Finocchiaro (1989:54), “Second language learning, therefore, means acquiring new habits or ways of using the speech organs and learning the forms and the arrangements of forms required by the system. It means acquiring the habit of the language through the intensive and extensive practice of

numerous examples.” Thus, English language learning is a process of learning English Language done by both English-speaking and non-English-speaking learners through conscious and active ways that causes change of behavior.

English language is not only learned by English native speakers who live in English-speaking countries but also by those living in non-English speaking countries. Kachru (1985) posited that the users of English are divided into three circles. They are the ‘inner’ circles which represent the native speakers; the ‘outer’ circles of second-language speakers (Malaysia, India, Singapore, the Phillipines, etc.); the ‘expanding’ circles representing people learning English as a foreign language.



1.3 The three circles of English

Indonesia is one of the expanding circles. In such countries like Indonesia, English is taught at school but it is used only inside schools; it is used in limited areas and occasions. At lower level of education, English is a compulsory subject as set by the curriculum and it is taught as an integrated subject. Learning English language at college, especially in English language study program, learners are provided with the detail of the subject like

linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, language acquisition, English language skills, and Cross Cultural Understanding.

In addition, Jack C. Richards in his paper *30 Years of TEFL/TESL: A Personal Reflection*, posited that English language learning now is as follow:

- English as a practical tool.
- English as a world commodity.
- English learning not necessarily linked to US or British cultural values.
- English teaching linked to national values.
- Mother-tongue influenced accent acceptable as well as native-speaker accent
- Comprehensibility the target

How do learners learn English language? So far, approaches and methods emerged in succession to replace one another. As stated by Brumfit (2001), earlier emerged did the Grammar-translation method. It is an approach to foreign language teaching through which learners learn a language in order to read its literature or in order to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development that result from foreign language study. Then, emerge the Natural Method that became the foundation for the Direct Method in which a foreign language was taught without translation or the use of the learner's native language if meaning was conveyed directly through demonstration and action. The most active period in the history of approaches and methods was from the 1950s to the 1980s. This era was started from the Audiolingual Method and the Situational Method which were followed by the Communicative Approach and the Silent Way, the Natural Approach, and Total Physical Response. In the 1990s, Content-based Instruction and Task-Based Language Teaching emerged and were followed by many others.

D. What is the Position of English Language Learning in Asian Countries and Indonesia?

In some of Asian countries, English is learned and used as Second language where English is a major language of commerce and education, a language that students often hear outside the walls of their classroom. In Indonesia, English is accorded as foreign language where it is not a major language of commerce and education. It means that the learners do not have ready-made context for communication beyond their classroom (Brown 2001:3, 116).

Furthermore, in Indonesia since English is treated as a foreign language which means it is spoken in limited area and use, it brings certain characteristics on the learning that is different from those in other regions where English is spoken as mother tongue or second language. As Citravelu et al. (2002:3) believe that it is necessary to understand the differences among the pupils. The characteristics of the English language learners in Indonesia may be summarized as follow: the learners are older than when they acquired their mother tongues, and thus will be more likely to use conscious memorizing process (Brumfit, 2001:28). And, since many of them start learning English when they are approaching adulthood, they will likely to have difficulties. When adults learn a language they have to deal with affective factors such as they are more self-conscious about making mistakes. Besides, as a foreign language, English is used in a very limited area and occasion. Learners use it only inside the classroom. Often, at the lower level of education such as high school, even the students rarely use it since they do not master the language well. Consequently, teachers have to compromise with the condition and use English

together with *Bahasa Indonesia* in delivering the subject. Despite all the condition, their government set English as one of the subjects tested in national final exam.

Today English becomes more important in non-English-speaking countries, especially those in Asia. So, why does English seem important in Asian countries? From the world growth trend from different sources, it is obvious that Asia-Pacific is becoming the center of great economic growth. Furthermore, the rise of Asia will increase multinational corporations. Thus, English learning is essential since it is an international language for doing international business (Komin, 1998: 264-5). Since Indonesia is a part of Asian countries, it also wants to keep up with the other countries in global rapid growth. One of the efforts done by the government is to include English language as one of the subjects of national final examination, and set the minimum passing score of the national examination for the English subjects for high school.

Because of the globalization of English, the growing prominence of World English, and the increasing need for English teachers around the world, the issues of appropriate competencies, expectations, and roles for native- and non-native-speaking teachers have received frequent discussion (Braine 1998, Cook 1999, Medgyes 1992;1994).

Graddol (2006) says that there is no single way of teaching English, no single way of learning it, no single motive for doing so, no single syllabus, no single way of assessing proficiency and, indeed, no single variety of English which provides the target of language. Therefore there is a wide range of diversity in the ways in which English is taught and learned around the world. When English is taught, the teachers should be aware of the situation and condition of the learners as well as the reasons in learning it. The English learning teaching in one country even in one area will be different from that in other areas,

and it makes sense since the characteristic of the learners also varies greatly in different areas.

The two common methods in English learning teaching are the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) and the teaching of English as a second language (ESL). EFL approach positions the learner as an outsider, as a foreigner; one who struggles to attain acceptance by the target community and the skills focused are speaking and listening. In ESL, English is often a language of home. Learners are started from younger age, and they learn all skills. Here English is a major language of commerce and education, a language that students often hear outside the walls of their classroom. In global English, the purpose of learning English is to get jobs; to communicate with other people having to do with business from other countries. The skills learned emphasize on intercultural communication strategy. Once again, however, the success of learning English is back to the reason of learning it and the environment of the learners.

E. Conclusion

The article above illustrates how English as an international language has spread widely. Economic growth occurs greatly in developing countries. The economic rise in developing countries referring to non-English-speaking countries make the people seek to strengthen their English to cope with the communication in business world. An individual, to be able to participate fully in the new economy – as worker, consumer, producer, and responsible citizen – needs to be even better informed and needs higher-order and more flexible skills in communication. This fact triggers the need to learn and acquire English to keep up with the communication in the rapid growth of economy.

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