

TEACHING ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE BY
INTRODUCING CULTURES AVAILABLE AROUND US

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ABSTRACT

The concept of English as an international language means English is treated as a global means of communication. This concept shows that English has various dialects influenced by the first language or it refers simply to the array of varieties of English spoken throughout the world. Therefore the focus of having a good model in a English as a foreign language class (EFL) does not rely mainly on cultures available in English speaking countries, but we can look around and see cultures available around us and integrate them into English language teaching. Many studies have highlighted that inserting culture particularly target language culture in EFL class is necessary because language is considered as carrier of culture. Moreover, integrating local culture is also interesting because local culture is hands on, available any time around us; it is literally spoken, and accessible; therefore it is not time consuming, it is cheaper and easier to be implemented. Moreover, it advances cooperative learning which improves independency and prepares students to live in globalized world. Viewed from teaching materials, local culture is rich for its diversity and helps students to develop their identity by thinking about their own culture and by learning about others. Through differences or similarities, they establish an understanding that each of them is different, and understanding that each of them has a culture which is interesting and beneficial to look at.

KEY WORDS

EFL (English as foreign language), local cultures

1. INTRODUCTION

It is the fact that this world has no distance anymore. We can communicate easily from one country to others. Rapid change in information and technology field makes us easy to do so. Globalization moves rapidly which increases the need of international language to connect nations and to get information.

Need to learn a foreign language which can make people to share information becomes obvious in order to be able to cope with today's world. Therefore, Phillipson (1982:6) argues that this time English is the language in which the fate of most of the world's millions is decided. By still respecting the availability of many languages in this world, people tend to take English as the *lingua franca* of the world.

How about in Indonesia?

Indonesia which has Bahasa Indonesia as the first language or national language realizes that having skill to communicate in English is absolutely important. Many efforts have been done to respond to this situation through curriculum development elaborated in many activities in formal and non-formal classes. What to teach and how to teach becomes interesting to be discussed in order to motivate learners to achieve the objective of the institution.

This paper is to explore ideas that can be used to motivate students to learn English by introducing cultures available in local community and the implementation of the concept to make teaching more interesting and effective.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The mutual connection between culture and language in language learning and teaching has been a settled issue. McKay (2003) argues that language teaching is influenced by culture in two ways, linguistic and pedagogical. The first is related to semantic, pragmatic and discourse level while pedagogically, it influences the choice of language materials. In addition, Wei (2005) says that language has dual characters, one is as a means of communication and the other is a carrier of culture.

Teaching language is also teaching culture. What to teach or teaching materials form important part in teaching process. Generally, teachers rely heavily on a diverse range of materials to support the learning process. Many textbooks are available, however, most teachers spend considerable time to continue producing their own materials by finding, selecting, evaluating and adapting them to get suitable materials for their class. This process is done by considering the objective, the level of difficulties and many other factors including the benefits, how interesting it is and how it can enhance students' knowledge.

One idea to make the process of teaching and learning interesting and enhancing student motivation is by integrating culture into EFL teaching. This idea has been positively responded for it has enlarged learner's knowledge about the target culture which leads to a cross cultural understanding because understanding culture means understanding people, their language, their creations, behaviours, beliefs, and their institutions. Culture and arts in

the culture-based teaching strategy include songs, folktales, handicraft, statue, painting, poem, cultural preservation places, dances, traditional costumes, food, recipe and accessories, tools.

Some advantages have been stated by Liebig regarding to cultural factors when they are applied in a class room. They are to develop understanding and sensitivity. Understanding and sensitivity avoid conflict and prepare students to live in globalized world. When we learn new language, we will find language items which function differently in social contexts. For example an item of "where are you going?" in Indonesia when it is expressed in greetings is considered as interaction and not as transaction. The item in social or interaction language and the questioner does not care about the destination. So if the item is considered as transaction language or information seeking by the receiver during the greetings phase, conflict or bad impression might not be avoided.

The Current Situation: Does the textbook content have Local Culture?

Most schools in Indonesia provide their students with text books according to the subjects learnt. English as one subject taught at schools also has its own textbooks. Such textbooks are produced massively and commercially for English as a foreign language classes. These textbooks are published to meet the needs of language learners so that they can communicate using English well. For that reason, it is essential that the textbooks should contain all components related to language mastery including its culture, which are based on learner's need, cultural background and level.

Textbooks produced, which have been observed, show that they insert cultural awareness in most each section. Take for example Look Ahead (Sudarwati, 2006), English in Action for Senior High School (James, 2006). These textbooks explore more English-speaking cultures rather than mirror local cultures. Information about Halloween, Shepherd/boy, Spiderman are found there, including typical houses, food, weather, history available in English-speaking countries.

Through the kinds of material, students learn about the target culture, and they are aware of other people culture. If successful integration takes place, the learners will act flexibly and sensibly along with cultural norms that they encounter within the target language culture. Therefore, the intercultural competence is fostered in every stage of English language learning experience which helps student to be ready to live in global society.

However, English is also considered as an international language, which means it does not belong a certain nation. On the other hand, language is also considered as a mirror of a particular society and language is carrier of culture. Then it can be concluded that English as an international language can be used by anyone to express a cultural heritage and it should function as the carrier of the native culture but more importantly pass on local culture. It is stressed here that learning English is not only to make students survive in target language countries. Some or many might not travel abroad or visit cities in US or British countries.

Therefore EFL teaching should lead a better understanding of the local culture and help students to have necessary linguistic, communicative and intercultural skill to reflect and portray their own society, to express themselves, and to present their own culture in the target language.

A. DISCUSSION

There are several characteristics of local culture. They are hands-on, literally spoken, and accessible. Hands on means it is active, it is around us. Local culture is not abstract but concrete because it can be done every where with every topic.

These characteristics can be explored as learning process by considering the basic principles of local culture. As Mark Wagler and Ruth Olson who has been working on local culture concept state that local culture encourage us to look at the familiar places in new way; to be curious; to ask questions that go beyond obvious; to learn to listen actively, to enjoy new experience; to ask students to actively look and share what they see and to connect place and human activity.

From the principles, several advantages can be identified when local culture is applied in EFL. First, local culture method involves dialogue between the participants and train their abilities to talk to each other about many things. Second, it works with text sources, oral histories, visual sources, interviews, recording data, interpretation and analysis. Then, it also creates and improves the quality of cooperative learning due to the demand of team work, face to face interaction, and individual and group responsibility. Students work together, talk about their plans with their teacher and they discuss their concept. This activity makes learning more sustainable and effective. In addition, local cultures involve people who have both more and less education such as teachers, school staff, students, parents, and all professions found in the neighbourhood. Finally, this method is very effective and efficient for all information is available around us. Therefore, Local culture advances cooperative learning because they work in groups, from planning, gathering information, discussing, interviewing, and presenting the project in front of the class.

How to Implement

This method is fully effective when we have diversity in our society. The diversity shows various culture. In Palembang, for example, several communities are available. They are community with various background such as from India, Arab, China, Java, native Palembang and many others.

The people who live around us is rich with cultural information. As it is said before that culture is about people, their language, their creation, behaviours, beliefs and their institutions. First thing to do is to see what is around us. Observe the people. For example, discover certain area or certain street such Indian stores along jalan Sudirman. Ask students to go there in groups and let them discover their habit, or food or wedding ceremony or any Indian festival. Students work in group and make it as a project for the class. After that, let them make report and present it in front of the class. This method advances cooperative learning which brings advantages that have been mentioned above.

Our institution is also part of local culture. People who works at one school come from different cultural background. They are also rich with information regarding to culture. Students are given a project to discover every one technique that he/she has in his/her house to handle problems like fever, sore throat etc. This interesting activity will involve students to do alot of talking, interviewing, telling, summarizing, and writing assignments.

They will learn to make notes as they realize that they cannot remember informations they get without writing them.

Not only street tour which is suggested here but many tour projects can be suggested here such as tour to "Kampung Arab", tour to native people along Musi river, China Town, Museums, and many others. By doing those things, students discover diversity, learn to share their cultural knowledge and experiences. This is very important that they go into local community and practice intercultural learning. They find out about social diversity and the diversity in used to enlarge their horizon and to learn from other people. However, not only diversity but also identity. Local culture is significantly related to identity. It helps students to develop their identity by thinking about their own culture and by learning about others. Before they involve in this kind of activity, they might have never thought about their identity before. Although they discover differences or similarities they establish an understanding that each of them is different but that each of them has a culture which is beneficial to look at.

4. CONCLUSION

Culture is interactions with other people. Every one has an interesting culture which needs to be discovered. culture was able to be integrated as a media of learning, that intended to motivate students to apply their knowledge, to cooperate with other students in a group, to show link among concepts in a course or more than one course.

When we say we understand culture means we we understand people, their language, their creations such as songs, folktales, handicraft, statue, painting, poem, cultural preservation places, dances, traditional costumes, food, recipe and accessories, tools. Since English is now treated as lingua franca of the world, EFL should focus on the importance of cultural awareness of target language. Learning foreign language, in term of English, is not merely to make students to survive in target language countries. Some or many of them might not travel abroad. Therefore, focusing on target language culture and ignoring local culture are not wise. Both local culture and target culture need to be explored by students. Consequently they learn through cooperative learning which make them understand about others and develop their identity which will make them ready to live in globalized world.

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