

CULTURE-ORIENTED IN EFL CURRICULUM FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT: Belajar bahasa tidak dapat dipisahkan dari belajar budaya. Tulisan ini memuat tentang orientasi budaya dalam kurikulum pengajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing di Indonesia, khususnya di tingkat sekolah menengah. Nilai budaya dalam EFL dianggap penting, khususnya bagi pelajar Indonesia, karena bahasa tersebut tidak hanya sebagai mata pelajaran yang harus dikuasai, tetapi juga sebagai refleksi budaya dari sebuah masyarakat di mana bahasa tersebut digunakan. Sejauh ini para pelajar memahami bahwa dengan belajar bahasa Inggris mereka akan dapat berkomunikasi dengan masyarakat dunia. Namun, mereka kurang menyadari bahwa ada alasan yang tidak kalah pentingnya dari hanya sekedar dapat berkomunikasi, yaitu untuk mengurangi kesalahpahaman yang mungkin terjadi akibat minimnya pengetahuan tentang budaya lawan bicara.

KEYWORDS: *Culture-oriented, EFL, curriculum*

THIS essay is concerned with the political and practical implications of understanding the nations and the logic relation between language, society and cultural difference conceptions to the social and cultural practice of education particularly to the EFL teaching in Indonesia. Recent literature has discussed language, society and cultural difference either in public debate or in education and in EFL teaching context which finally ends in the way the conceptions are implemented to social and political practices. Through these discussions, it is expected to investigate an adequate model of an approach to the teaching of English in Indonesian secondary schools, in order to inform the understanding of how each factor may affect the use of English in the future of students.

The understanding of cultural differences in EFL is important especially to Indonesian learners since the language is not merely as subject

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matter to be learned but also as the cultural reflection of the society in which the language is used. Understanding the culture of the language is also important since the differences in culture not only occur in different languages but also occur among the speakers of the same language. It seems that this point will be more easily understood by the Indonesian learners due to the remarkably high index level (83%) of cultural diversity in Indonesia.

In this essay the discussions are divided into three interconnected parts. The analysis begins with the theoretical underpinnings the relation between language, society and cultural difference and the implications in the practice of education. This part *mainly* discusses Stuart Hall's conception of *representation* in explaining the relation between language, society, and cultural difference, and Alastair Penny Cook's arguments relating to representation that have underpinned the notion of English itself and its changing role as a global language and also its implication to education and EFL curriculum.¹

The next part of this essay discusses the overall view of the social context of teaching EFL in Indonesia and the current EFL curriculum for secondary education, the implications, and some problems faced by EFL teachers in implementing the conception in classrooms. Using the basis of understanding to the conception and practice of education and the workplace, this essay finally analyzes the social contexts of teaching in schools as of primary concern in which my professional perceptions of EFL teaching have been continually changing and some consequences of these changing perceptions toward the EFL curriculum.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND ASSUMPTIONS

Concept of Language, Society, and Cultural Difference

The concepts of language, society and cultural difference have a scholarly debate in many perspectives in contemporary topics. Part of the debate around the concepts revolves around issues of the role of language as social, cultural and political practices particularly in education and EFL teaching around the world. Central to this, Stuart Hall's idea of representation which pulls together the concept and the interconnectedness of language, society, and cultural difference, and applies them to our society is important to understand.²

Representation according to Hall is the production and circulation of meaning through 'language' as a system of representation.³ This production of meanings is considered as something out of the material world

through some conceptual framework and languages. Moreover, meaning can change and the change is always possible. This means that language is central to meaning and through which we can make sense of the world.

When meaning is shared within a society using a language, culture is there. Hall describes culture in more social context as ‘shared values/ meanings’ of a group or of society or whatever is distinctive about the ‘way of life’ of a people, community, and nation or social group.⁴ However, traditionally culture is also understood as “the best that has been thought and said” in a society. It is the sum of the great ideas, as represented in the classic works of literature, painting, music and philosophy—the ‘high culture’ of the age. Moreover, culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings—‘the giving and taking of meaning’—between the members of a society or group and culture is also about value-feelings or attachments, emotions, concepts and ideas. He elaborates all these in a more clearly ways of questioning self about who we are, what we feel, to which group we feel we belong to, which then he said readable and understandable by others. Thus, when we all ask ourselves as individuals, “what belongs to *me*, to *my* culture?” we are rewarded with a spectacular variety of responses; in this way, different perspectives and ownership of different cultural traditions enriches everyone. But when we ask “what belongs to *us*, to *our* culture?” we ask a much harder question. Do the people in Indonesia for example or of any culturally complex human society, necessarily share common cultural elements? If so, who gets to decide what those elements are?

To get a better understanding of the place of meaning produced, and the interconnected of cultural practices, it is worthy to consider ‘circuit of culture’ in another book of Hall’s.⁵ Here, *representation* is defined as ‘the production and circulation of meaning through language’ and “language” as system of representation, as a signifying practice. *Regulation* is known as something related to government policies and regulations. It is also the reproduction of a particular pattern and order of signifying practices (so that things appear to be ‘regular’ or ‘natural’). Another point to put into account is that regulation also cultural policy as well as cultural politics, involving struggles over meanings, values, forms of subjectivity and identity or a dynamic process that is often contested. *Identity* is derived from a multiplicity of sources (from nationality, ethnicity, social class, community, gender, sexuality), which may conflict in the construction of identity positions and lead to contradictory fragmented identities. Identity gives us a location in the world and presents the link between us and the society in which we live. *Production* in this case is “cultural economy”

economic processes and practices as cultural phenomena, as depending on meaning for their effective operation while *consumption* is an active process and often celebrated as pleasure. Moreover, in postmodern accounts, cultural consumption is seen as being the very material out of which we construct our identities: we become what we consume.

All the elements of culture: language, society, and cultural difference, in Hall's view are intimately connected. He describes that these elements are doing a dynamic interaction in the process of producing and developing social meanings. He views culture as the biggest circle which covers 'shared meanings' or what people negotiate within the society. In the sub-discourse of culture or 'shared meanings', language plays the role to activate the whole process to produce meanings which depend much on representation. Representation is a language component and it is a process that enables people to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings. Meaning is what represented in people's agreement about things they negotiate and this possibly happens only in social practices. Meanings are not found but produced and constructed. Thus, it is clear that representation is the central of the social practices which, in turn, produce culture. All these are negotiable and circulated in social contexts and shifted across cultures.

Understanding the concept of representation as signifying practices which is central to Hall's point of view is very important in English language teaching since students have to negotiate new is very important in English language teaching since students have to negotiate new different meanings and different representation from the target language. Besides, as EFL teachers in classroom we need to be aware of ways in which representations of difference influence our work with students by setting up a relation among them.

English Language: Post Colonialism and World Wide Englishes

To the EFL teachers, understanding the spread and the role of English word-widely, and why we should teach it as a core subject is very important since it concerns the cultural identity and government policies. To some extent, it deals with the political and practical implications to the social and cultural practice of education, particularly in English language teaching. The most common questions asked toward the changing role of English is the relation between language and post colonialism, the notion of language of imperialism, and whether English language neutral, global and open to everyone.

As a global system, Alastair Penny Cook brings up his critics in his book "*English and the Discourses of Colonialism*" and it is considered an

outstanding contribution to the discourse of the politics of English.⁶ In this book, Penny Cook argues that the colonialism context produced particular cultural constructs 'discourses' that became linked to English. He questions the extent to which English is, as commonly assumed, an unencumbered medium of communication, and to what extent it is, by contrast, a language that comes laden with meanings.⁷ By examining colonial language policies in India, Malaysia and Hong Kong, he shows how various policies emerged which both reflected and produced colonial discourses.

The position that came to dominate Indian education, as expressed in the Despatch of 1854 was "a pragmatic Orientalism, that on the one hand acknowledged the superiority of English and Western knowledge, but on the other sought to develop and control India through the use of vernacular education". This policy was to have profound consequences in shaping the educational systems of British colonial societies in Asia. Having elaborated the case of English in India, Penny Cook, who once worked as an English teacher in Hong Kong, returns with his argumentative narrative to that former colony in order to examine how the political discourses of Indian English played out elsewhere. In disparate locales of the British Empire: Malaysia, Hong Kong, and later Palestine, the example of English education in India was continually cited negatively, for it was believed to produce half-educated and pretentious colonial subjects who did not know their place. One of the constant complaints against English education was that it unfitted the natives for hard labor: a *babu* class arose. Thus British colonialism found itself in a language dilemma of its own making.

Penny Cook provides an excellent discussion of the encounter between Chinese and English education in a chapter entitled 'Hong Kong: Opium and Riots, English and Chinese,' with a prolonged tracing of policy history in that colony. This point concerns the presence of Western male desire and the shaping of Chinese femininity through English language education for women. In subsequent chapters Pennycook examines how cultural projections and representational 'fixity' inhabit narrative choices concerning "the Orient", and how such fixities shape English language education. A central lesson drawn by the end of this book lies in how deeply colonial language policies of the nineteenth century continue to mold today's educational practices; indeed, they have shaped much of the debate between cultural particularism and universalism.

The most interesting part to EFL teachers in this book is the point that Penny Cook is convincing in arguing that there is a profoundly colonialist dynamic driving the English teaching industry. This late twentieth-century generalization concerning overseas English language instructors closely

resembles the outlines of colonialism's agents and educators in the last century. Imperial English is the neo-colonial global project of our day and quite like those Asian and African natives silently watching Victorian English colonizers, today's non-Anglophones needing fluent English instruction frequently have an accurate estimate of the teachers they face. Given economic weakness, they have little choice in teaching personnel and must largely accept the odd drifters they attract, people whose major life accomplishment lies in having chosen the right birth language. English language teaching becomes the profession of those who have no other, while it has become a necessity for non Anglophone students who want to gain a professional education and distinguish themselves from the failures who are their teachers.

Furthermore, Pennycook draws his idea that English is the same colonial language accomplishment that it was in the last century. It is even more so today. Globalist economic ideologies have pronounced English a key element in creating technical labor forces that meet their investment specifications, and national ministries of education have uniformly complied with these ideological demands by stacking their pedagogical chips on More English. Teachers colleges churn out more and more English teachers, quite frequently women in search of a skill in a labor market that they cannot enter in other capacities due to cultural and family constraints. Other language teachers, particularly Russians, face declining or near-extinct professional demand. Even as the representation of English-speakers as a percentage of the global population declines, the symbolic value of English continues to soar.

Between contemporary reiterations of old-style Imperial English and a neo-colonial ideological internalization of English as a global economic imperative, the political features of ELT bear a grim aspect. Under the paradigms of neo-liberalism, a preference to speak languages other than English, or worse, outright refusal to learn English, represents suicidal personal and political choices, although there is no rational correspondence between command of a specific foreign language and earning potential or social justice. When English becomes the sole gateway for accomplishment, ELT classes become an injustice.

FACTS ABOUT INDONESIA AND THE EFL TEACHING

Indonesia at Clance

Indonesia is an archipelago with more than 13,000 islands. Five main islands and some small ones are inhabited by about 206,338,000 people. The

country is divided into 31 provinces. Each is with her own local language with different sublanguages and dialects, customs and cultures. As recorded by UNO, there are more than 700 different ethnics and 731 local languages in Indonesia (726 of them are living languages), 2 are second languages without mother tongue speakers.. However, the data will probably need to be revised since the independence of East Timor from Indonesia. The popular term used is 'unity in diversity'. To make the communication possible and to avoid cultural misunderstanding among different ethnics, we use Bahasa Indonesia as the lingua Franca. However, if we meet people from the same ethnic, we will be considered arrogant if we used bahasa Indonesia or foreign languages. The same is true when we use English in public places with other Indonesian friends to practice speaking, even at schools.

Language Plan and EFL Teaching: Why is It Difficult?

Politically, Bahasa Indonesia is the national and official language of Indonesia. This language is used in schools as the language of instruction, mass media and in the government. It is also taught at school as a core subject. To maintain the cultural heritage of all different ethnics in the 31 provinces, the government encourages the teaching of local languages of which the students' ethnic belong. On the other hand, English is taught as EFL in schools of all levels. Fifteen years ago, other foreign languages were also taught in schools, such as, Dutch, German and French but then slowly left since these languages are considered powerless in global market place.

English is one of the core units to be taught at secondary schools. In 1994, a new national curriculum was implemented for EFL at the junior and senior high school level and it has been revised in 1999. Formerly, the English curriculum was grammar-focused but now it stresses more on the communicative approach. The only things this curriculum lacking are the culture of its native language and content overloaded. These are big issues among the EFL curriculum developers, educators, EFL teachers, and the government in Indonesia nowadays.

At least, there are three main reasons of the cultural problem in EFL curriculum for secondary schools in Indonesia. *First*, there is a cultural confrontation when we as EFL teachers introduce the target culture through some materials from original English textbook in classroom. As we know that the majority of Indonesian people commit to Islam (about 90%), many of the themes that are inappropriate for Muslims audience should not be used in teaching. Themes like sexism, drugs, alcohol, are likely to invite protest and disagreement among the Muslim community. For this

reason, we as EFL teachers are challenged and struggling in such dilemmatic situation. On the one hand, we have to implement the ideas underpin the importance of cultural understanding in teaching a language. On the other hand, we are facing a society out of school context which is reluctant to immerse new values.

Chastain suggests that in the culture-oriented language classroom, "the teaching of culture is an integral, organized component and cultural knowledge is one of the basic goals of the course".⁸ In this pedagogical perspective, attention to cultural issues is necessary for a full understanding of second language classroom processes.⁹ Goals of an EFL program become not only culturally centered but also culturally indoctrinating. Presentation of a culture in a program must not encourage cultural stereotypes; students must become aware that human beings are cultural beings; they must be taught the notion of the relativity of cultural values; and they must accept some cultural discomfort when the values of the target language culture conflict with their native language culture. *Second*, the government policy on the practice of education rules the need to maintain Indonesian 'mass and popular culture', as the protection against global impact of western culture on our young generation's way of life and way of behaving. *Third*, it is still unclear what the culture(s) attached to English language since the current trend of 'Englishes' are likely no longer belong to one particular nation.

To summarize, Indonesian people are encouraged to master at least three different languages. They have to be able to speak their local languages to maintain their cultural heritage attached in their languages and as the proud of being the part of the ethnic. They have to be able to use Bahasa Indonesia and be literate to it to communicate between ethnics and as the proud of one nation. Lastly, they have to at least able to understand English as it is important in communication among nations.

THE ANALYSIS OF THE EFL TEACHING AND CURRICULUM OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS

How Do We Teach English So Far?

Experts on language teaching and other language and cultural practitioners show the one-sidedness on putting the cultural aspects of the target language in EFL teaching materials explicitly in curriculum. This agreement seems reasonable since the use of English and any other language is always culture bound although the language itself is not bound to any specific culture or political system. However, they seem to have a debate when dealing with what sort of cultural aspects should be taught.

The forms of popular culture as one of the 'physical appearance' or manifestations of the culture (e.g. customs, dance, song, paint, etc) are likely to dominate the inputs of teaching materials. The same is true for the national EFL curriculum for secondary education in Indonesia. The contexts are mostly Indonesian cultures due to the government policy of maintaining our cultural heritages. However, it is deeply deplored that the culture elements in language related to the proper conduct of language use is often neglected whereas in fact the understanding of sort of element is important to the EFL learners. Such element is important regarding that it is part of the communicative competence as one of the intrinsic features of speech. This part is essential to EFL learners to be able to share ideas among nations.

So far, most of the secondary education students in Indonesia understand that the main purpose of learning English is to get and to share the idea across the non Indonesian speakers around the world. However, most of them do not have enough understanding that the other reason to learn English is to minimize misunderstandings by knowing and understanding the culture of the country where the language is spoken. The EFL teachers in this case should play their role as language and culture educators by implicitly attaching the cultural aspects in the way the target language is produced by their speakers.

As an example of the EFL curriculum 'crisis' result in Indonesia, here is the story of the impact in applying a language without cultural understanding. One of my students told me her bad experience when greeting an anthropologist from America who had to trespass her house yard every morning and afternoon since it was the only access to get into and out of the anthropologist's rental house, "*Good morning Sir, where are you going?*" The anthropologist replied with a strange face (according to my student) "*Oh, sorry, I can't find any alternative access except your house yard, I have no choice. I'm sorry!*" My student asked me what was wrong with her greet. He just tried to be polite to the foreigner but the foreigner showed the unexpected reply upon her greet.

The above picture is only one example of the way that culture is reflected in a language. As a native Indonesian speaker who was learning to speak English, my student fully understood that there was nothing wrong with her expression. The words, the structure and the pronunciation were correct. Even the manner, she believed, that she did it appropriately. However, as a native English speaker with his natural schemata of English speaking culture, the anthropologist (regardless the profession) was likely misunderstood and failed to negotiate meaning with my student. He

probably thought that it was not a good idea to trespass one's private property while my student did not care about the trespassing rather than tried to be polite and friendly to a white foreigner. In this case, it is clear to say that neither my student nor the anthropologist had a correct understanding of cultural difference.

It is very common to hear Indonesian people greet each other informally with "*Mau ke mana?* (Where are you?)" or "*Dari mana?* (Where have you been?)". In fact, the greeter does not expect an honest response. A short response like "*jalan-jalan*" (take a walk) or "*ke pasar*" (to the market) is more than enough as a polite reply. Chinese probably greet each other with "What is your lunch?" or "What have you taken for lunch?" and so on. Americans and Australians on the other hand, will probably feel more convenient to greet with "How are you?," "How are you doing?," or "How are you going?" All these are only small part of cultural understanding in using a language. Thus, the question is simply asked to the EFL teachers of what and how the culture of the language is implemented in classroom situation.

What Should be The Curriculum and The Classroom Activities Like?

Adjusted Cultural Contents of Curriculum

Understanding the notion and the concept of representation as signifying practices which is central to Hall's point of view is very crucial in doing our work as EFL teachers in classroom. Since we deal with different students with different individual needs in classroom situation, we need to rethink what sort of curriculum which accommodates and respects their different needs. Besides, we also need to be aware of ways in which representations of difference influence our work with students by setting up a relation among them.

Although it seems very sophisticated to deal with the culture-oriented in EFL teaching in Indonesia, there are always feasible ways to overcome the problem in Indonesian secondary schools' classroom. Concerning the culture in EFL teaching and curriculum, there are some specific suggestions ranging from the using authentic sources to developing and maintaining the positive attitude toward the English language and the culture. There are also suggestions to use various classroom techniques which implicitly asserting the target language cultural content. However, such ideas are still on the level of concept only.

Using authentic sources from wide ranges of texts as EFL curriculum contents is challenging but interesting. Teachers can manage to pick topics of students' interest, such as sports, art, leisure activities, transportation,

and tourism from original values. The danger of such cultural immersion is not that it will take class time which could be used to study formally the target language. Rather the pitfall is a cultural, not a linguistic, one that the teacher might misrepresent the target culture. Therefore, Chastain reminds that if the second culture is presented in such a way that false impressions arise; the alternative of 'no culture' is preferable. It is seemingly contradictory choice since the culture-oriented classroom insists that there is no alternative to teaching culture as it is commonly known that language and culture are intertwined. However, the admonition is frequently made. Lado suggests that in presenting the target culture or comparing the target culture with the native culture, the teacher must avoid value judgments from without because of the danger of calling bad what is merely different, or calling good what is merely pleasing to the outside observer.¹⁰ Rivers agrees that since EFL teachers are seldom anthropological or sociological experts, in attempting to fit complicated cultural systems into a simplified framework, we run the danger of imparting or reinforcing stereotypes of attitudes and behaviour about the target or even the native culture.¹¹

Therefore, while advocates of the culture-centered classroom believe that its daily activities must have a cultural as well as a linguistic basis, they are aware of the perils of the cultural approach: the difficulty of selecting cultural items that are representative of the target culture, the problems of contrasting cultural items between the native culture and the target culture, and again the possibility that the EFL teacher is not knowledgeable enough of a society or culture to select and present these cultural items. Recent critics of the culture-oriented classroom have elaborated on some of the ill effects of emphasizing culture in the EFL classroom.

Other important cautions pointed out by Holly and Philipson who see a new colonialism emerging through the marketing and promotion of English by Western Capitalism for economic ends, the result being an undermining of native cultures.¹² Heiman examines the negative consequences of including Western culture in EFL instruction, focusing on the degradation of the learners' culture of origin. It adversely affects views toward "global ecology" and traditional spiritual life.¹³ She continues that there are risks involved in "teaching aspects of the culture of English speaking nations", hazards that threaten religion and other aspects of traditional life in some Third World nations.¹⁴ Cultural deracination, according to Hyde may result in the erosion of belief in the ability of native culture and language to deal with the modern world.¹⁵

Classroom Activities

It is inevitable that teaching EFL needs various classroom activities to draw students' attention to the target language. Nevertheless, EFL teachers should seek to show the close relationship between language and culture because the study of a language constantly demands an interpretation through system of representation of socially determined meaning and vice versa, the study of different aspects of culture requires an understanding of the verbal aspects of that culture Stern.¹⁶ Moreover, Robinett argues that each word used in the EFL classroom is conditioned on the part of both speaker and hearer by each person's own particular, personal experiences and those experiences that are common to the culture of which he or she is a part.¹⁷ Thus, the EFL classroom cannot escape the pervasive influence of culture since classroom discourse features encode cultural norms and beliefs.

Furthermore, students must be able to understand the cultural reference and confront to cultural norms in all English language skills like listening, reading, or writing. They have to know the different connotations of words, and interpret a culture's particular figurative use of language. Thus, fundamental aspects of the target culture must be incorporated into the ongoing class activities and included in the tests over the material covered. During these activities, constant attention should be paid to comparing linguistic variation within the students' own culture with linguistic variation within the target culture.

In addition, particular classroom activities should be designed to emphasize the culture of the target language. This can be done through cultural asides or cultural notes using brief and interpolated explanations by the teacher about a cultural point.¹⁸ Also, cultural lecture presentations may be used by the EFL teacher, as well as films, film strips, video cassettes or television shows, slides, tape recordings, and print media such as newspapers and journals from or about the country or countries where the target language is spoken.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Hall's idea of representation is an important paradigm to discuss language and culture phenomena in social practices of education. Through his ideas of representation, EFL teachers are on call to keep aware and to take-for-granted the ways they interpret the target culture in which students are likely to negotiate meanings using all their own culture schemata. Failing to do this will lead to what Pennycook said as one form of language colonization.

EFL teaching for secondary schools in Indonesia is continuously facing a dilemmatic and paradox situation. On the one hand, it is encouraged to bridge the communication gaps among other nations in globalised times. On the other hand, it brings a big issue to the language plan and cultural identity of Indonesia. Certain ways are progressively discussed and developed to minimize the negative impacts of English language colonisation and imperialism. However, Indonesian people are aware that in turn, they do not have many choices to get rid of the paradox and this uncomfortable situation.

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