

## **Promoting Local Culture in ELT to Enhance Students' Character**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper mainly discusses about the critical analysis of the current practice of English language teaching which pay less attention in local culture and also to propose the alternative solution for the sake of supporting and promoting character of education in Indonesia. In the line of the national education goal, it seems that the most possible way to overcome this is by integrating Indonesian local culture values in the practice of English Language teaching to enhance students' character.

**Key words:** *local culture, English language teaching, character education.*

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## INTRODUCTION

It is widely known that quality of education is a concern and a challenge to all nations in the world. Since education is one of identities of one country. The better quality of education that a country has, the better quality of human resources it has. The Government of Indonesia has defined the term of education in the Act of Republic Indonesia of National System that maybe considered as:

...means 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))

In other words, education is a process of teaching, training, and learning to improve knowledge and develop skills in purpose of enhancing students' characters. Therefore, it is necessary to keep attention to the practices of educational system in our country in order to gain the main goals of education by considering all aspects determining the success of educational practices; parents, school elements, and government. One of the goals is providing better generation in the future who can maintain religious, national, and cultural values of this country and at the same time remain actively responsive to the needs of the ever changing era.

This paper attempts to the fact of common practices of teaching and learning process of English in our country which provide most of foreign culture attached in learning materials. In line of national education objectives, this paper also tends to propose a new point of view in the practice of English language teaching by promoting local culture to enhance students' character in Indonesia.

## **The Practice of English Language Teaching in**

### **Indonesia**

English is essential to be learned and used in communication, as we have already agreed that young generations need to master English well in order to actively participate in the globalization era. The necessity to understand English is inevitable for Indonesian citizens to access communication and development in many areas.

In addition, Philips (1996) stated that English had a dominant position in science, technology, medicine, computer, research, transnational business, diplomatic field, mass media, and educational system as a foreign language which is learned worldwide, so that English takes the biggest part among the other languages in the world. It has made English as the most important subject taught in schools and become one of the subjects examined in national examination. English is also taught in early childhood so that it becomes local content in Kindergartens and Elementary schools.

Unfortunately, the current practice of the educational system in Indonesia still focuses on the foreign educational system which is sometimes

not matched with the system in our country. Kuswandono (2011) said that:

Indonesia tends to draw mostly on Western educational concepts and practices is hardly undeniable, as reflected in various education reform agendas at management, curriculum, and pedagogical levels. The colonial inheritance of Western education models, training in English-speaking countries through overseas aid programs and the strong dependence on Western knowledge have been thought to have influenced Indonesia's education system predominantly. However, these reform agendas are not always met with success. In fact, stories of failure are heard repeatedly, and education stakeholders are constantly faced with difficulties and challenges in implementing these reforms.

It means that Indonesia keep focusing on the western educational concepts to apply in teaching and learning process. However, sometimes it gets failure as there are so many different things which are different in Indonesia and western countries. It can be seen from the management which sometimes still focuses on the government management. Curriculum

keeps changing so that Indonesia does not have the permanent reference to check the most appropriate curriculum to apply in Indonesia. According to Fitriya (2016), since 1945, Indonesian curriculum has been changing for eleven times (1947, 1952, 1964, 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, 1999, 2004, and 2006). It makes the English teachers got confused in determining the proper materials to deliver in the teaching and learning process, as one it had been made, they have to change it again in the next semester or year. It also happens with the textbook. The students should buy a new textbook as their curriculum has been changed.

To add this pain, some schools use western curriculum rather than curriculum which has been constructed by Indonesian Government. Indonesian teachers sometimes still use pedagogical levels which are from western countries. Moreover, they neglect the students' needs and levels without observing what the students want. In contrary, Regmi (2011) stated that the concept of language teaching now is that of concentration in what the learners learn or want to learn rather than what is to be taught. As the classrooms get more learner-centered, it can be assumed that

the attitude and the initiatives from the learners' side will be more prominent.

In the same line, the practice of English language teaching in our country still concern in making students able to communicate by using English well. English teachers have done extra works to gain this objective. They always try to use various interesting activities to present the context of culture in which those items being discussed. Some of them even give the explanation on certain language items accompanied by the context of culture in which those items used (Sudartini, 2012). This fact is very common in the practice of foreign language classrooms. What may be becoming the concern is on whether the presentation of this foreign culture is accompanied by the explanation of our own culture. Since the culture of Indonesia is still neglected by the teachers because they are too lazy to find the Indonesian text or they have to translate it into English first. It will make the students get less understanding and knowledge about Indonesian culture.

In order to gain the objectives of teaching and learning goals as stated in the curriculum, most of teachers are busy with finding the appropriate and

relevant materials without having critical analysis on the cultural biases that maybe covered within the source materials. In fact, the materials used by the teachers contain foreign cultures which are very different with our own culture. So that it is very essential for the teachers to bring Indonesian culture to be inserted in teaching material during the process of teaching and learning.

Promoting local culture in teaching and learning process of English will create positive sides to a lot of people in education. Teacher, as a doer, will have a lot of choices of materials and teaching strategies in delivering material by using culture as a theme. Students, as the focus of study, will broaden their horizon about culture of the country they live with. The students will understand well about the materials given by the teachers without having cultural bias about the reading text they read if they read about material which culture of their own country.

#### Promoting Local Culture

Wardhugh (1986) defined language as a system of conventional symbols used for communication by a whole community. In other words,

language is a system of sound as the results of speakers used to communicate in a whole community. Meanwhile, culture is all pervasive and complex, which is reflected in every aspect of life. And obviously, language is the key to the cultural heritage of another people or that knowledge of another language enables individuals to increase their personal culture through contact with great minds and literatures. (Qu, 2010, p. 1). Both language and culture look like two flipped of coin, they are affecting each other. When someone learns language, he or she should learn its culture too.

Brennan (2009) also claimed that local culture provides a sense of identity for rural communities and residents. This identity facilitates common understandings, traditions, and values, all central to the identification of plans of action to improve well-being. Culture contributes to building a sense of local identity and solidarity. It influences the confidence rural communities have for coming together to address specific needs and problems.

According to Tomalin (2008), the international role of the English language and globalization are the two main reasons to teach culture as a fifth

language skill, in addition to listening, speaking, reading and writing. What the fifth language skill teaches us to become mindset and technique in adapting people of English to learn about, understand and appreciate the values, ways of doing things and unique qualities of other cultures. It involves understanding how to use language to accept differences, to be flexible and tolerant of ways of doing things which might be different to us. It is an attitudinal change that is expressed through the use of language.

Tomalin (2008) further argues that teaching of culture in ELT should include cultural knowledge, cultural values (the 'psyche' of the country, what people think is important), cultural behavior (knowledge of daily routines and behavior), and cultural skills (the development of intercultural sensitivity and awareness, using English language as the medium of interaction). In other words, all the components above are fundamental values in order to make the more understanding in filtering culture in the process of learning English.

McKay (2003) cited in Genc and Bada (2005) contends that culture influences language teaching in two ways; linguistic and pedagogical.

Linguistically, it affects the semantics, pragmatics, and discourse level of the language. In pedagogic, it influences the choice of language materials because the cultural content of the language materials and the cultural basis of the teaching methodology are to be taken into consideration while deciding upon the language materials. It means that culture plays important role in teaching and learning process.

Beside those two influences, Kitao (2000) cited in Genc and Bada (2005) describes the benefits of studying culture:

1. Studying culture gives students a reason to study the target language as well as rendering the study of L2 meaningful.
2. Learning culture would help learners relate the abstract sounds and forms of a language to real people and places.
3. The study of culture increases learners' not only curiosity about interest in target countries but also their motivation.
4. Studying culture gives learners a liking for the

native speakers of target language. Studying culture also plays a useful role in general education; studying culture, we should also learn about geography, history, etc. of target culture.

The use of culture as a material in English language teaching is one of the possible solutions to stimulate students' interest in learning English. To chose this topic as a material in ELT could give the students benefits as described above.

What may be the most important impact of the current English language teaching practices is the loss of our own culture since young generations no longer have clear understanding of it. They tend to understand foreign culture including norms and values rather than their own cultural norms and values. Young generation feels foreign culture is cool and modern. They are very proud to buy and wear import stuffs and feel shy to use the local culture stuffs. They may even forget their cultural identity. All of students engaged in 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 or local culture while explaining the foreign culture in the classrooms.

In the purpose of cultivating national culture in English language teaching process, the teachers are able to use local culture as a media to inform the heritage of our own culture as well as delivering the materials to gain the main objectives of learning English. It includes traditional foods, traditional cloths, traditional sports, traditional houses, traditional dance, tourism resorts, etc. By using these various options, English teachers could have many authentic materials that could be used.

In order to begin teaching local culture as materials in the classroom, the teachers should know students' language background, students' prior knowledge, their needs, their interest, and their cultural background. It is impossible to introduce the local culture that all of students do not have any idea of that culture or the teachers give the materials which are not appropriate and relevant to the curriculum. So that the teachers have to be wise to choose the most suitable materials to deliver to the students based on their need and to gain the main objectives of learning English

based on the curriculum. These following pictures are the example of local culture of Palembang which can be used in English language teaching.



**Traditional Cloth**



**Traditional Food**



**Traditional Dance**

Those pictures above are able to use as the material for reading, writing, listening, and speaking skill. As example, for reading, the teacher can use the history of Palembang Traditional Dance as the material for the students to read. It clearly explains the use of traditional dance, the dancers, the clothes, etc. After that, the teachers should insert some questions related to the text in order to check students' reading comprehension. For speaking, the students are able to tell about their favorite food, for example Pempek, to their friends in front of the classroom. They can share how it is made, where it is sold, and also the history, so that their friends are able to get more information and knowledge from the simple thing.

Afterwards, the teachers are able to use Palembang Traditional Cloth as the material to write. The students are able to use their prior knowledge and find more information in books or internet in order to get more comprehension about a topic to write. Besides, the teachers are able to another topic related to Palembang's culture as the material for listening skill.

### **Character Education**

Character Education is a national movement creating schools that foster and caring young people by modeling and teaching good character through an emphasis on universal values that we all share (Gore, 2012). It is the intentional, proactive effort by



schools, districts, and states to instill in their students important core, ethical, and civic values such as respect, responsibility, integrity, perseverance, courage, justice, and self-discipline. Character education has becoming big issues at the present. The need to build national character has also been becoming one the central concern of the government.

Besides, the definition of character comes from the point of view of someone who is moralistic, that is a person who wishes to treat moral categories as broadly as possible, and to give moral terms the most frequent possible use, character will appear to lie entirely within the domain of morality. The education of character will cover moral education and to have a good character equivalent to being morally irreproachable to a high degree.

On the other hand, Kementrian Pendidikan Nasional (2004) mentions that the term character is closely related to attitudes, behaviors, or personalities of a particular person formed as the result of internalization of believed virtues commonly used as the foundations of his views, ways of thinking, attitudes or behaviors. Therefore, the development of nation

character must be done in the form of building individual character. Since individuals live in social and cultural environment, the effort of building individual characters in this case students' characters must be done in his or her own social and cultural environment. In the same line, the development of national and cultural character must be done in an educational process which considers learners as parts of their social, culture, and national cultural settings.

Promoting local culture in the process of English language teaching becomes a brilliant idea for teachers to deliver the proper material which is really suitable with goals of curriculum. The students will know and comprehend about the materials given and the history in the materials. It will cultivate good characters for students who appreciate their own local culture. The students will more realize that they have to conserve their own culture in order not to be neglected. This action will happen continuously if they are fed with the proper materials related to the goals of teaching which is using local culture as in idea to improve students' character.

## CONCLUSION

It is commonly known that the practice of English language teaching in our country still concern in making students able to communicate by using English well. Most people agree that the practice of English language teaching cannot be separated with teaching its culture. This may lead the students to have better understanding of foreign culture rather than their own culture. Promoting local culture in English language teaching could be the way to improve their nationalism awareness as the one of character education goals as well as to broaden their knowledge of the heritage of their own country.

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