

INTEGRATING LOCAL CONTEXT TO TEACHING ENGLISH FOR YOUNG LEARNERS (EYL)

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Abstract: English for young learners (EYL) studies have dealt with quiet number of teaching methods and strategies. However, researchers have not conducted adequate analyses of EYL teacher candidates' creativity in integrating the local context into their lesson plans. This writing, therefore, address this issue by analyzing the teacher candidates' portfolio when they take English for Children course. Limitation of accessibility, however, have led this study to only focus on analyzing the portfolios submitted by the teacher candidates pursuing their S1 degree in an English Language Teaching Department of State Islamic College of Metro Lampung, Indonesia. This study will contribute to filling the gap of the stakeholders' expectation toward the possibility of integrating the local context, particularly Islamic values as they are the prominent characteristic of the college, into the arena of ELT within Indonesian context. The analysis shows that local and ideological features are inseparable in ELT and that those are commonly integrated with songs and pictures.

Keywords: EYL, EFL, ELT, creativity, local context

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been wide interest in English for young learners (EYL) within the Indonesian context. EYL has gotten more and more attention from the stakeholders: parents, learners, teachers, principals, and bureaucrats. Although it is not officially embedded as a part of national curriculum anymore, it is still a unique selling point for the rapid growth of the so-called bilingual or international schools. The deletion of English subject from elementary school curriculum 2013 might not stop the discussion on EYL. On the contrary, it challenges the English teachers to redefine the significance of EYL itself, for, at least, prominent

elementary schools are still allowed to include English as a local content of their curriculum.

It is generally accepted that early start of English learning as a foreign language will be beneficial for both the children's intellectual growth and their English language proficiency. Pimsleur argued that the children possess a fascinating potency in learning new language(s). They are basically equipped with amazing brain in that they can learn and master 10 languages. One of the reasonable steps to do so is by introducing core vocabularies, or high frequency words, of the language(s) gradually yet consistently. When such introduction occurs within the teaching and

learning context, it should be delivered in an enjoyable atmosphere intensively (Republika, April 24, 2012). As such, a proper introduction of foreign language to the children is believed to be a good starting point.

The practice of EYL in the classroom has been extensively studied. However, less attention has been paid to the aspects coming before the practice itself such as the preparation and readiness of the EYL teacher candidates. Of the many interesting aspects, the teacher candidates' creativity in integrating the local context into their lesson plans still needs further investigation. Local context, in one hand, is an element that ought to be seriously considered while creativity, on the other hand, is a factor needed to contextualize the teaching material. Hence, it is of interest to figure out how the teacher candidates of an Islamic higher education creatively integrate the local features and Islamic values into their teaching practice.

The aim of this paper is to redefine the significance of EYL within the Indonesian context. That is by describing the possible connection between local features, Islamic values, and English language in its context as a foreign and international language. ELT adaptation to local context, in its broadest sense, might be a way of building bridges between two different cultures. Pertinent to this, the problem in this present writing can be spelled as follows: "How do the teacher candidates creatively integrate the local context into their teaching practice?"

Before proceeding with the findings and discussion, the writer assumed that some related theories need to be presented. The theories

include the eclectic approach in EYL, teaching material for EYL, local context, and creativity.

Eclectic Approach in EYL

According to Sutrisno, an eclectic approach is relevant in building up the principles of teaching English for young learners. The approach is a combination of a wide variety of the experts' statements. It adopts such notion from Locke stating the child as blank slate, Vygotsky arguing the child as social being, and Piaget maintaining the child as active learner. The basic assumptions underlying each notion are treated as colorful fragments shaping a contextual mosaic (2004: 329). The eclectic approach allows the teachers and parents to perpetuate what is good existing within each notion, and to formulate a much more meaningful approach.

Furthermore, Sutrisno exemplifies the implementation of the eclectic approach. He points out that the children play three different roles when they are learning. First, the children play the role of a ready-filled blank slate when they are given lessons. In such, the teachers and parents ought to provide them with a conducive learning environment. One plausible way to do so is by minimizing the external distraction when the learning is taking place. Second, the children's being blank slate will turn into active learner when they are trying to understand something new. Once they have adequate input, they tend to put the input into practice through the so-called trial and error process. It is the process then which is believed to lead the children to discovering the knowledge by themselves. When the trial and error process involves the children's social environment, they

play the third role namely social being. This description shows the children's malleability in that they are able to move from one learning style into another: blank slate, active learner, and social being (2004: 330). It is obvious, then, that the children are very flexible and that both the teachers and parents could take advantage of such characteristics.

The notion of eclectic approach had also been proposed by Cameron by embracing the principles stated by Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner. The combination of the principles is seen clearly in the following statements related to the teaching language for young learners:

- a. The children are full of curiosity in that they always try to understand what they are told or ordered. In such, the teachers and parents should understand and adapt accordingly.
- b. The children need room and opportunity to improve their language proficiency. The concept of *Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP)* could be implemented to find out what the children could do with and without social interaction.
- c. The children need cues to meaning that may not be noticed. Whenever possible, the children should be exposed to language in use for they cannot take full advantage from the formal grammar learning.
- d. The children's language development can be seen as the internalization of social interaction. That is, the development works in line with the children's ability in using vocabulary, sentence, and new expression.
- e. Language learning for young learners could be influenced by experience. What the children learn is as important as how they are taught and who teach them. Principally, the broader the content is, the more experience the children possess. The content or the teaching material ought not to be limited to certain topics. Yet, it should be developed in terms of its practicality and context. (Lynne Cameron, 2001: 19-20).

Teaching Material for EYL

There is no a clear-cut limitation on what should be taught to the young learners of English. Nevertheless, Joan Kang Shin proposes some common topics to teach among others: animals, friends, family, environment, citizenship, shopping, units found within the children's story book, internet, public figures, and movie (2012: 6).

The teaching material can be delivered randomly or linearly. The random mode delivery is influenced by the context and the children's experience. For instance, when the children are doing shopping, they can be exposed to some basic vocabularies and expressions related to the shopping activity. Such contextual teaching can be introduced even if the children have not been exposed to the vocabularies related to the environment.

The English lesson materials for young learners should be in line with several supporting factors such as the children's cognitive development, age, and supplementary materials. The cognitive development varies among the same age. In other words, the children of the same age might have different intellectual capacity. In addition to the age, Danny et.al, state

that by the age of 4 years, most children have mastered the basic vocabulary and structure of their first language. When they are 5 years old, their proficiency of the first language is relatively stable (Danny *et.al.*,: 2001: 3). One logical implication of this theory is that if English is to be taught to the Indonesian children using Indonesian language, English complex expression ought to be introduced after the children have a good level of their first language. It means that those complex English expressions might be introduced after 4 years of the children's age.

The third factor to consider is the supplementary materials available around the children's environment. Jean Brewster *et.al.*, suggest the use of serial reading texts, authentic short stories, songs, rhyme, game poster, flashcard, CD, VCD, computer program or suitable software, and internet (Jean Brewster, 2002: 156).

The use of supporting media, besides the books used in the school, will make the learning process much more interesting. The advance of technology nowadays makes the access to the supporting media easier. Both the teachers and the parents can utilize, modify, and contextualize the media in accordance with the children's needs.

Creativity and Local Context in EYL

Creativity has long been believed as an essential factor in EYL. Shin argues that „creativity is key“ when teaching English for children, both in English as foreign language (EFL) context and English as a second language (ESL) (Joan Kang Shin, 2012: 43). In order to teach English

in an interesting atmosphere, the teachers are required to possess adequate creativity. They have to build a paradigm in that children should have fun with English. In such, the teachers will direct themselves to set up a stimulating lesson plan covering such activities as singing, finger plays, storytelling and so forth.

Etymologically, creativity deals with the ability to create something (KBBI, 2005: 599). Pertaining to EYL, creativity refers to the teachers' ability to create or to add something new to the common teaching practices. Todd argues that creative teachers are those who use beneficial variety of classroom activities. To do so, the teachers ought to comprehend the existing theoretical aspects and adapt them to meet the students' needs. The creative teachers are to design teaching materials and classroom activities tailored to specific, unique, and real classes (Todd, 2003: 50). In such context, the local wisdom, religious view, personal experiences find their way to be integrated into the classroom activities.

It goes without saying that contextual approaches considering the local features are believed to be an alternative solution to meet the specific needs of the learners. Wang and Clifford maintain that English language teaching differ from place to place. Such factors as political situation, cultural background, micro perceptions and practices of individual teachers and learners are influential. That is one of the reasons why in Asia context, the Western paradigm of English language teaching is not as prestigious as at it

was (Wang and Hill, 2011: 205). Again, religious and local features have special place in such paradigm shift.

While EFL and EYL pedagogy within Indonesian context are mostly, if not all, taken from those theorized by foreign educationists, many theorists might suggest that EYL teachers utilize their local features in the classrooms so that the teaching activities could be contextual and personal. It is creativity, then, that offers the bridge between the well-established EYL pedagogy and the local feature. The teachers of EYL in an Islamic institution, for example, might want to change the lyrics of popular English or Indonesian song. Such lyrics could be made in line with the instructional aims and be adjusted to meet the Islamic messages. Another plausible way is by translating Indonesian fairy tales or the ones rooted in Islamic repertoire into English.

METHOD

To answer the research question stated earlier, this section presents the information about the corpus to analyze in this writing. The data were collected from the students' portfolios when they attended English for Children, an elective course in English Language Teaching Department (henceforth PBI-*Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris*) of State Islamic College (henceforth STAIN-*Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri*) of Jurai Siwo Metro Lampung, Indonesia.

In the selection of the students' portfolio as the sources of the data, the writer conceded to

employ a convenience sampling (Ary, *et.al.*, 2006: 174). The writer used the students in his own classes and involved the available and suitable portfolios to his study. The writer realized that this sampling procedure might be the weakest one in nonprobability sampling. Yet, a cautious interpretation to the data would be conducted to make a rich description for the study.

A semi-structured interview was also used as the instrument for the data collection. It allowed the writer to probe for views and opinions of the participants pertaining to their creative process in integrating the local context into their teaching practice.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This section will present two points of interpretive explanation or discussion of the writer's analyzing the process of integrating the local context into EYL teaching practice, namely: (1) PBI STAIN: Islamic institutional context; and (2) Creativity of integrating the local context.

PBI STAIN: Islamic Institutional Context

As the only one state Islamic college in Metro city, PBI STAIN Jurai Siwo might play a crucial role in educating English teacher candidates for the region. A state Islamic college is likely to be the most affordable one, in term of tuition, for many people in the region and is assumed reputable because of its „state“ status. Moreover, the attribute of Islamic college shows another expectation of the stakeholders: integration of Islamic values into the teaching and learning process.

English Language Education is one of the departments held by the college since 2000. The department aims to create professional and reliable English teachers that could integrate Islamic values and academic domain. In pursuing such mission, the department is committed to: (1) developing the students' personality through enhancing their insight on religion and nation; (2) creating a democratic, humanistic, and modern academic atmosphere; (3) enriching the students' theoretical and practical capabilities in teaching; (4) providing the students with adequate supporting service; and (5) implementing an integrated education system that enable the students to be critical and skilful teachers with excellent morals. Those strategic commitments are hoped to generate valuable contributions toward the development of Indonesia as well as toward Islam religion.

The teachers graduated from PBI STAIN Jurai Siwo Metro are supposed to be well-performed in that they could establish synergy among Islamic values, global values, and local wisdom. They are expected to build a good relationship with all elements of the society, in its broadest term, particularly through teaching practices. Under such perspective, the course of English for Children is offered for the students.

Creativity of Integrating the Local Context

Pertaining to the fact that there has not been a single approach, method, or strategy which is best suited for all teaching contexts, a teacher's creativity deserves attention. Such creativity can take any forms. Our finding shows that the most common

forms are songs and pictures. Below are the analysis of each form:

1. Songs

The following songs appeared in the students' portfolios without, unfortunately, adequate information about the writer of the song. It is so, presumably, because the songs might have been there in the real teaching practices.

Hello

*Assalamualaikum,
Salam selamat dan sejahtera
Saling mendoakan di antara kita
Jawablah Walaikumsalam*

*Good morning, good
morning Good morning,
good morning Hello, how are
you*

Hello, how are you?

Hello, hello, hello

Hello, how do you

do Hello, hello, hello

Hello, how do you

do

Selamat pagi teman-teman

Semua, semua

Apa kabar kamu?

Baik-baik saja selalu, selalu...

Hijaiyyah Alphabet

Come on, come on all my friends

Let's learn the holy Qur'an

Hijaiyyah alphabet

To be fluent to read Qur'an

Al-Qur'an is the

reading Having many

benefits

With great reward from

Allah To get to the paradise

A ba ta tsa ja ha kha

*Da dza ra za sa sya sha
Dha tha dza ,,a gha fa qa
Ka la ma na wa ha a ya*

*Ayo kawan semua
Kita belajar membaca
Huruf hijaiyyah
Tuk lancar baca Qur"annya*

*Al-Qur"an bacaannya
Banyak manfaatnya
Besar pahalanya
Bekal untuk ke surga*

The two songs above show a recurrent pattern of three interesting points that, to certain extent, combine several aspects of language teaching particularly translation process. The first point is the Islamic terms or phrases (*assalamualaikum* and *wa"alaikum salam*) which remain untranslated into English. The second point is the Indonesian lyrics that corresponds to the pragmatic translation of both the Islamic phrases and, later on, the English lyrics. Pragmatic translation itself is a kind of translation with an emphasis on the accuracy of the message from the source language into the target language. The last point is the English lyrics.

Mostly, the songs found within the students" portfolios were gotten from the English classes they had attended or observed. Some of the songs were downloaded from the internet along with their visual dimension, few were adaptation from the Indonesian popular songs. That is by replacing the Indonesian lyrics with English lyrics.

It is obvious, then, that the general pattern of the song is the combination of Islamic phrases, Indonesian lyrics, and corresponding English lyrics. The lyrics were made in line with the basic topics of Islamic teaching and English

teaching for children such as greeting, recognizing *hijaiyyah* alphabets. The adaptation of Indonesian popular song, *Iwak Peyek* for example, shows that local wisdom could be blended in harmony in the context of teaching English for young learners.

2. Picture

It is no exaggeration to say that picture is the simplest form of creativity shown by the students. It is easily found in internet. The students downloaded the pictures and printed them in the size best suited their needs. With a little modification, the pictures were made simple puppets. Below are the examples of the pictures found in the students" portfolios:

Gambar 3
Contoh Media Wayang Adaptasi (Foto Repro)



The pictures above, *Spong Bob* and *Dora Emon*, are believed to be among the most familiar characters for Indonesian children. The characters were utilized as the teaching aids to show a simple dialogue in English. They were eye-catching and interesting for the children in that the English conversation material presented through the characters are assumed stimulating.

Gambar 4
Contoh Media Kreasi (Foto Repro)



Another pictures were played by thread and small woods in an interesting way. The student played the role as a mastermind that controlled three different characters in front of the class. Although the pictures were not that familiar for the Indonesian children, the way they were played was at least different from that of the puppet. This, therefore, enrich the students' repertoire of how to utilize pictures creatively.

Whenever the students utilized the pictures, they seemed to follow a general rule of thumb: finding out colorful and familiar pictures, presenting an English material through the pictures, and introducing Islamic phrases through the dialogues between or among the characters. Besides, that the pictures can be played like a puppet might be a way to keep an Indonesian art called *Wayang Golek*. It is believed that puppet is still well-known among the Indonesian children. It is noteworthy that the use of internationally recognized characters like Spong Bob and Dora Emon played through Indonesian art way show a good integration of global values and local wisdom aspect.

CONCLUSION

In the midst of the English paradigm shift when there is no single method suited for all contexts of teaching, creativity is needed particularly to meet a certain teaching context such as Islamic institutional context. Such creativity seems to follow general structure in that it combines the global values, Islamic values, and local wisdom.

SUGGESTIONS

The findings as summarized above bear some implications among others are: (1) increasing awareness among the educational leaders and the public about the advantages of TEYL, (2) including the English as a local content in basic education and the same time respecting the regional governments excluding it, (3) providing opportunities to professional development for the English teachers, (4) designing appropriate and contextual material and learning tools, and (5) respecting

any form of creativity that incorporates global values, ideological values, and local wisdom.

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