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The Value of Local Content in ELT Materials

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Abstract— The new paradigm on the position of English in the world has shifted as English is now, no longer the property of native speakers. This shifting paradigm challenges the traditional assumption of English teaching world on whether English teachers should incorporate local or target culture in their teaching materials. This is a qualitative research using critical literature review method. The topic being discussed in this article is how to incorporate local value in English language teaching materials. The issue is analyzed from various perspectives, they are: world Englishes, English as International Language, culture and identity, materials development and how they shape the idea of how English teaching materials should be developed. In order to do that, the researcher highlighted four criteria of a good ELT material proposed by McDonough, Shaw, & Masuhara, (2013). Two suggestions are provided as an outcome of this research. They are creating a team of book developers and providing alternative ELT materials based on different learning styles, text genres, or even viewpoint towards an issue.

Keywords— EIL, world Englishes, ELT, materials development, local content

I. INTRODUCTION

The application of English is increasing and it was and is a continuous subject of investigation on pedagogy. Though the more people use it, English is still considered as a foreign language and people did not use it in an Anglo-Saxon way. Language classrooms outside the native speaking countries are filled with local learners and non-native teachers and textbooks were utilized for the academic resources. Alcoberes (2016) argued that countries using English materials not only for academic purposes but also to promote intercultural awareness so that when someday the students grow up, they would be able to apply English competencies they got in the real life and work field as well understand their own culture and the culture of others (Afriyeni, 2020; Winingsih et al., 2021). In a wider range, English can be used as a tool to promote international communication in globalized world.

The notion of English as lingua-franca was now globalized. Kachru (1998) describes the needs to integrate L1 to L2 learning.

This notion of “English as an Asian language” promoted the notion that English was no longer exclusively owned by western or English-speaking countries only. This new concept led Kachru et al., (2006) to the theoretical framework of World Englishes (WE) which categorized Asian English into three different part. First, it was inner circle country. This circle covered greater Asia by Australia and New Zealand, where English become native language and mother tongue. Secondly, it was outer circle country, where English was used as institutional additional language. English was not considered as first language here, however, people in these countries used English as official or working language in judiciary, higher education, commerce and others. English spread through colonialization and imperial expansion. Thirdly, it was expanding circle country. It encircled Indonesia, China, Japan among others. These countries have no direct history of colonialization with English-speaking country and the government has no mandatory rule to use English as main or second language. Yet, they still use English as a communication means in International setting.

From this point, we can clearly see the position of English in these countries as a foreign language. Though English was not always used by majority of the people in daily life, thus it was important to increase English comprehension for the importance of engagement in international context and setting as well as gaining more knowledge in other fields of knowledge, since there were many discourses using English as their medium. Besides the nature of English as a subject, we also need to explore nature of ELT materials.

Materials in language teaching help teachers in respect to its role as the ground of language learning input as well as language practice in the classroom. The form of the materials may vary in several kinds; printed materials (course books, worksheets), non-print materials (video, audio materials), and materials that accommodate both printed and non- printed (internet, newspaper, magazine, computer based) (Richards, 2001). Since its various range of types, this essay will be more focus in discussing the role of local content in printed materials.



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Moreover, English language teaching materials play important role in English teaching. The function of materials in teaching learning process was not necessarily to debilitate teachers nor student's role in the class. Instead, materials were able to scaffold both teachers and learners works in the class as well as served as agent of changes, as well as promoting students' culture (Normalela, 2022). Previous study on the characteristics of course books conducted by Dat (2008) revealed that there were three characteristics entitled imported course books, in-country course books and regional course books.

Imported books were terms used to refer "global course books". They were the books that were produced by English-speaking publisher like Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Longman, and Heinemann. Besides, the books provide visually interesting figures that stimulate student's curiosity and the texts were vary in genres and cover wide range of topics. In other hands, the limitation of this type of books are that they occasionally portrayed inaccuracy in promoting cultural information and pictures that mislead students to the inaccurate information. Furthermore, the materials developed in imported books were incoherent with local curriculum goals. Large number of ELT teachers prefer global course books to the local one since they believe that the imported materials were more accurate in terms of the English use (Zacharias, 2005).

The second type was in-country course books. In-country course books or domestic course books were materials produced by local publishers itself. Books classified in this sector were made in accordance with the particular curriculum practiced in that country. The benefit of the books in this manner are: the books voice the national identities, beliefs, cultural existence and anything related with that country, readings provided in the books are also familiar with the pupils, and the concluding goal of them was to prepare the students in facing any summative and formative test conducted by teachers. On the contrary, the rich amount of familiar content may result in students' unwillingness to learn, for they already knew the cultural aspects discussed. Another weakness was there would be several linguistics inaccuracies since the texts were translated from mother tongue to English.

Lastly, it is the regional course books. These books were written by non-English speakers in a particular country, then imported and accepted as learning materials in several other countries. This practice is widely found and adopted. The benefit of these books are similar with in-country course books because basically they are produced and used among ASEAN countries themselves.

However, the shortcomings of these materials were that they will demonstrate the different English proficiency levels among countries. Books written by publishing companies of native speaking countries may have higher standard that cannot be coped with the students of an outer circle country in which English is used daily, compared with expanding circle countries where English is used as medium of Instructions only in formal setting as foreign language.

The dominant type of books available for students shift through time. About 15 years ago, domestic materials were most common for students, especially those from state schools. Their affordability was the main factor why the books were popular. The second most common was global materials. Because of its higher price these books were widely utilized in private schools, educational institution which, were stereotyped with the affluent. Regional books were the most unlikely. Trust issue may be the cause why these books were unfamiliar. Most curriculum designers tend to believe that because it is English then the books have to be written by native authors. But, now, global materials tend to be most favorable books among students and parents (Zacharias, 2005). Zacharias added that locally-published materials were often poorly edited. Such circumstance makes the high number of global books, which were mostly well-developed, and take over the local books' position..

II. EXISTING CONDITION AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Prior research conducted by (Zacharias, 2005) points out that 67% of teachers prefer using global books to domestic books. Besides the availability and better-quality content as mentioned in the background, teachers also believed that materials from English speaking countries natural, authentic, realistic, and original content that provide appropriate exposure for the students to learn English. Since the course books developed by the people who consider English as first language, the content may not suitable with the speaker who considers English as foreign language. It may cause several impediments. The problems may occur if teachers prefer to use global books which can be divided into four kinds.

The first one is declining cultural sensitivity. It refers to the circumstances where there was inability to be aware that differences and similarities between people among various cultural background exist. Sometimes there are words and behaviors which are acceptable in one region but considered taboo in others.



For example, “standing under the mistletoe” may not be in line with the norm and culture of another learner. It could be an interesting topic somewhere else. These cultural differences may result in anxiety experience by the students (Yanti & Hardi, 2019).

The second one is different levels between the books and the learners. One of the roles of the materials is to facilitate students in their learning process. The books they used must be understandable, in terms of the language used. The books, since developed by native, were comprehensible to native students, but not for local learners.

The next one is inequality view point for those who have different cultures. The notion of promoting one’s culture in an English textbook of learners from other cultures was – so that students can appreciate what it meant to be culturally different. Students are expected to be aware that respecting others beyond classroom was also important. In fact, Tomlinson et al., (2001) found something different.

For example, in one of the lessons British lifestyle was treated as a reference for comparison. While the book exploits the good side of British, it also showed (perceived) inappropriate side of other’s culture. The lifestyle stereotyping which exists in the books tend to present the wrong side of the non-native people.

The last one is the books do not contribute to the students’ needs of immediate use of the target language. Relevancy of the content in the books is also important since students needed to know what is the benefit they get after learning the materials. This is in line with Fadoli (2022) who argued that context and background knowledge would help learners understand and communicate better.

Declining cultural sensitivity, different levels between the books and the learners, inequality view point for those who have different cultures, as well as the content of the books do not contribute to the students’ needs of immediate use of the target language were the reason why we need to do a research about how to incorporate local value in ELT materials. It is because language teaching is not only about deciding what are the suitable materials to use, but also have to work with specific group of learners and specific set of aims (McDonough et al., 2013). In order to do that, we have to step backward to the process of materials development. Material developments and evaluation process play significance role to make the coursebooks effective.

III. METHOD

This is a research using critical literature review method. What it means by using critical literature review method is that in this research the author analyzes the topics of the implementation of local and target culture English materials. By using existing knowledge to analyze a topic, literature review method would be helpful as it will help synthesize previous research more systematically (Tranfield et al., 2003). By synthesizing previous research systematically, a literature review article would help readers to understand the topic better.

The object of the research is the issue about how to incorporate local value in ELT materials in Indonesia. In order to do that, the researcher implemented four criteria of a good ELT materials proposed by McDonough et al., (2013). After that, this issue was also used for top down analysis starting from a very broad concept namely World Englishes and then scrutinize to a more specific topic namely English as International Language, culture and identity in language teaching, English as identity construction and finally discussion about English materials in teaching and learning context. All paragraphs must be indented. All paragraphs must be justified, i.e. both left-justified and right-justified.

IV. MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

A. *Materials Development*

Material development referred to all processes made use of by practitioners or teachers who produce or use materials for language learning. This process covered materials evaluation, adaptation, design, production, exploitation and research. As materials developed were made for specific group of learners, then teachers have to ensure that the resources were suitable for their local context (McDonough et al., 2013; Miller et al., 2007).

There are several criteria of a good material based on McDonough et al., (2013) who propose four parameters: The first one is usability factor. It dealt with how the materials can be used in learning, as a core or just supplementary materials. The second one is generalizability factor. Some parts of the materials may be useful for particular group of learners of individual, but it did not necessarily suit the other groups. The third one is adaptability factor.

It deals with how it is possible that some parts of the material to be added, extracted or used in another context or modified for local circumstances. The last one is flexibility factor. It dealt with how rigid the sequencing or grading. The less steeply- graded the materials, the more flexible the material was.

From those explanations it can be clearly see that one of the important factors of material development is adaptability factor. Learning materials are considered appropriate when they can be integrated with local values. In conclusion, it is rational that localization of the materials plays significance role in English language teaching materials.

The next question is, what is the definition of localization?

The term localization derived from the word local that has the meaning as restricted for particular region. But, since localization become the hotly discussed issue in the field of materials development (Tomlinson, 2012), the interpretation of localization was expanding. To define localization, one uses the term “flexibility” (Masuhara et al., 2008). Flexibility appears to accommodate the needs to satisfy learners across countries with various styles, preferences, cultural identity, and background. In addition, flexibility was a course book quality that allows teachers to adjust and make the books fit with the teaching context by adapting, diversifying, selecting, contextualizing, utilizing strategies, blending, expanding, among other decisions that can maximize the teaching and learning impact (Dat, 2015).

The term “Humanizing” was also proposed by (Tomlinson, 2012) to promote localization. Tomlinson observed the need to cater to different characteristics of students by humanizing the course books. The books have to accommodate students’ interest, enthusiasm, views, attitude as well as connecting it with their minds and match it with sociological realities of group of learners. Many books failed to accomplish this “humanizing” factor and it led to the minimum engagement of the students towards the learning process. In brief, localizing the materials was not only adapting the content and context of the materials to the local one, but also to adjust it so that it can match with students’ sociological realities of the learners.

B. The Value of Local Content

Since it is believed that local content is valuable to be integrated in the ELT materials, this paper proposes three arguments why it is rationale. First, it is personal involvement that could help learners to use language to communicate effectively, affectively, and cognitively.

When the materials used in class are related with socio-cultural condition of the learners, they can relate with the passage discussed. This condition referred as “cultural appropriation”, a condition where learners own a foreign language and culture by adopting and adapting it to their needs and interest (Kramsch (2014) as cited in Munandar & Ulwiyah, (2012)). Besides, affective and cognitive participation of the students would help them process the acquisition of language. Processing occurs when there is personal involvement as well familiarity with local customs and occupation (Munandar & Ulwiyah, 2012; Tomlinson, 2012). For example, if there were a teacher or lecturer who were teaching, reading a passage about the benefit of fasting would be much more likely to encourage students’ motivation than if it was about how to build a snowman in winter.

Second, it provides familiar lexical and cultural items that helps students to be involved with the learning process. We cannot put aside the fact that students would learn about intercultural competence and social awareness through English subject. But, the main goal of learning a new language is to be able to master the language itself. Since the subject is English, not social science, then the betterment of students’ English proficiency is the very first thing that needs to be catered. This is why adjusting course book with the local content will help students understand the instruction better, that hopefully results in students’ better English comprehension. Furthermore, teaching English adopting (not adapting) the target culture makes it difficult for students since they might find lexical or vocabulary items that they are unfamiliar with (Kristiawan, 2012).

C. The Drawbacks

As beneficial as the local content might be, they are not without drawbacks. English course books with no localization is mostly likely to promote independent learning that is very important to boost students’ English skill. Nonetheless, non-native learners are not accustomed to the notion of independent learning. No matter how good it might be, if this style is introduced to the students all of sudden, they will spend more time to be familiarized with independent learning style than truly learn English.

Also, it is often imagined that other cultures were needed since students need to broaden their horizon as well have the knowledge of cross-cultural understanding. Although the basis idea of this claim is valid, it suffers from a flaw in its understanding of the concept of localization.



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To make the materials local is to make them acceptable in particular group of learners. It is not necessarily throwing away course books with global perspectives, but make some adjustments to make it suitable for learners. Teachers could drop the parts that not suitable with the local context than replace it with the more suitable one.

The next question is about how to comprehend the significance of other cultures if local content has the biggest proportion? There are 2 main considerations regarding this question. Firstly, most of the global materials, as I explained above, do not truly respect the idea that we are equal social beings. The books stereotype or see one group of people as less capable than others. Secondly, the notion of localization is not to eliminate all of non-native culture of the target learners. It is just by adding what is necessary and take out the unnecessary. So, cultural awareness can still be taught by equipping learners with beliefs, values, and behavior of their own than try to discover what is important in other cultures so they can understand what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. Besides, course materials need to provide opportunity for the students to become themselves in new language as well as respecting others (Dat, 2006).

D. The Implication

Localization affects not only the content of the material but also the learning styles. Most ELT teachers tend to teach grammar and focus on drilling and memorizing vocabulary items and grammar formulas. This notion needs to be adjusted since the localization of the materials can accommodate students' engagement with their surroundings. Teachers have to be more creative to see the maximum potential usage of the materials. Many of the course books exclusively provide cognitive approach without considering other approaches (Tomlinson et al., 2001). Teachers also need to encourage themselves to respect learners as individual and try to engage them personally in many activities.

V. CONCLUSIONS

It is the time for teachers and curriculum developers to give more attention to the course books and any related ELT materials to make them more suitable with target learners. Particular individual or group of learners have different cultural sensitivities, ideologies, and even learning styles. Course books need to be created in a relevant manner to many contexts and open to evaluation and modification.

Below are suggestions that may be useful for teachers to teach ELT materials with local content value. The first is creating a team of content developers. A team of book developers and evaluators should be formed. It is advisable that the team consists of people who share the same enthusiasm and vision but could be with different specializations. This team may consist of teachers, linguists, socio-cultural experts, and artists among others. The exact way has been demonstrated by Tomlinson when he and his team wrote materials for learners in Namibia (Tomlinson, 2012). The second one is providing alternatives ELT materials. Material developers should try to provide different materials based on different learning styles, text genres, or even viewpoint towards an issue. These will help teachers to choose what is the suitable for them the most. By providing these 2 approaches, we hope that students could get a better English teaching material and eventually help them to learn English better. Figures must be numbered using Arabic numerals. Figure captions must be in 8 pt Regular font. Captions of a single line must be centered whereas multi-line captions must be justified. Captions with figure numbers must be placed after their associated figures

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