

TEACHING TOLERANCE THROUGH INTERCULTURAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING TO ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study aims to find out how the intercultural English language learning can foster values of tolerance in elementary school students, as well as how it is implemented by teacher in the classroom. This research used a case study research design and the subjects in this study were a teacher and 20 6th grade students at an elementary school in Karawang. Data collection techniques were carried out by observation in 4 class meetings to observe the learning activities and interview with a teacher and 6 students. From the observations, this study showed that intercultural English language learning was moderately relevant to apply to elementary students. The teacher used simple, fun and stimulating activities and material such as songs, short stories and games in English, both from native culture (Indonesian) and target culture (English). Students could learn the use of English while recognizing cultural differences between native and target culture and languages. On the other hand, from the interview, students stated that they were very pleased with the method applied. They expressed their pleasure because they could get to know other cultures and most importantly they accept cultural differences as an amazement. Therefore, it can be concluded that students at a young age are fair enough to be introduced intercultural learning so they can think critically and have a tolerant attitude from an early age. However, the teaching method and material should be adapted to their age and thinking capacity.

Keywords: *Teaching English; intercultural language learning; tolerance; critical thinking, young learner.*

INTRODUCTION

English language learning should not only emphasize the understanding of content and grammar, but also it needs to consider aspects of cultural skills and literacy as part of language teaching. The problem that often arises as non-native speakers of English is lack of understanding about context and meaning of a discourse described by the target language (English), so it can cause misunderstandings. Therefore, Brown (2000) states that in teaching English, understanding of the culture of the target language is one of factors that can facilitate foreign language learners in contextual and meaningful ways.

In Intercultural language learning, the target language (English) also involves its culture which aims to develop the character of someone who is culturally competent, so it is called an "intercultural person" or someone who has attitude of tolerance, accept differences, and does not judge other cultures as wrong (Byram et al, 2002). Students are also expected to have the ability to put their own cultural values and views and can foster empathy and respect the cultural values of others because they see the world from different lens (Fitzgerald, 2000)

In this case, the attitude of tolerance is very important and will be very good if introduced early in learning at schools, especially learning English. Therefore, intercultural language learning can be an alternative method that can be applied in classroom to students in elementary school. With this method, students are not only taught grammar content, but also the cultural literacy of the target language. This is very important considering that there are many cases of intolerance that are increasingly spreading in Indonesia. Data from the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission, intolerance cases are always increasing every year, and some

of these cases are quite serious violations. In 2016 there were almost 100 cases, and in 2017 there were 155 cases (Putra, 2017).

Therefore, this research highlights the importance of the intercultural language learning in learning English along with the development of the character of students who are tolerant, empathetic and can appreciate the differences around them. The character must be built from early age because it will be their foundation as they can apply in social life.

There are several studies that discuss the teaching of tolerance in learning English. First, Levina et al (2015) conducted a study entitled "Teaching tolerance in the English language classroom" which concluded that teaching tolerance values can create a tolerant attitude of students in an atmosphere of mutual respect for one another. Another study entitled "Culture-Integrated Teaching for the Enhancement of EFL Learners" conducted by Abdollahi-Guilani et al (2012) concluded the importance of including cultural values in learning English because the cultural literacy of the target language can help students see the world more wisely.

However, so far no similar studies have been found that specifically discuss intercultural language learning and tolerance in learning English for elementary school students. And this research will raise the title with two problem formulations as follows:

1. How is intercultural language learning applied in learning English to students in elementary schools?
2. How can the method of intercultural language learning foster tolerance to students?

Relationship between Language and Culture

Language and culture are two interrelated and inseparable things. Language is part of culture and culture is part of language (Seelye, 1993). Kramersch (1998) identifies three ways how language and culture are related to each other. First, language expresses cultural reality. This means that people express facts and ideas with words, it also reflects their attitude. Second, language is an embodiment of cultural reality. People give meaning to their experiences through communication tools. Third, language symbolizes cultural reality. People see their language as a symbol of their social identity. Language is categorized as a social practice (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013). Language is used to express, create and interpret meaning and to build and maintain social and interpersonal relationships.

Culture can also be seen as an important variable to describe the utterances chosen by native speakers (Alwasilah, 1991). Each language spoken by native speakers has a different culture from other languages. This will not be understood if the interlocutor has no background knowledge of the culture of native speakers. Some utterances may not be understood and can be very problematic by the interlocutor with a different culture if the native speaker does not have the cultural knowledge of the interlocutor (Grundy, 2008). Furthermore, Risager (2007) distinguishes three perspectives of the relationship between language and culture. 1) culture is embedded in pragmatic and semantic language, 2) culture as a macro context of language use and 3) culture as a thematic content of language teaching. Thus, teaching culture must be an integral part of foreign language teaching because both are inseparable parts.

Definition of Intercultural Language Learning

The concept of Intercultural Language Learning is not teaching or introducing foreign cultures to students, but it rather on how students can see their own cultural differences with foreign cultures as a challenge (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013). Students are taught to be critical in seeing differences and able to solve the problems they face. Peck (1998) adds that culture must be a message for students and language as a medium for the use of language for communication in classroom activities such as discussion and conversation. The content discussed is about the culture of the target language itself (English) which begins with students' initial knowledge of their own culture. Thus, foreign language learning must also be integrated with the target language culture and compare it with the language and culture itself.

Liddicoat et al (2003) explain that at the global level the goals of language and culture learning are as follows.

- 1) Understand and respect all languages and cultures
- 2) Understand and respect their own language and culture
- 3) Understand and respect the language and culture of other people
- 4) Understand and appreciate how to mediate between language and culture
- 5) Develop intercultural sensitivity as an ongoing goal.

Therefore, in teaching English in the classroom, teachers are responsible for making students understand their own culture before exploring other cultures and languages (Valverde: 2005). As a process of developing intercultural understanding, students must be able to position as a 'decenter' or mediator of their own culture (Byram, 1989). This mediator has two roles: as the mediator of

his own language and culture in communicating with others and the mediator in the teaching and learning process.

Liddicoat et al (2003) and Liddicoat & Scarino (2013) develop the principles of intercultural language learning. These principles consist of five general principles of learning, which are also important for the language of teaching and learning. These principles are intended to guide curriculum design and classroom interaction to promote effective language and cultural learning. The principles consist of the following:

- a) Active construction: This principle encourages students to know and build their own knowledge of the target culture, so that they are able to describe, analyze, and compare their own language and culture with the target culture and language.
- b) Making connection: In this principle students need to connect something new with what is already known, especially between their own culture and the target culture.
- c) Social interaction: Students engage in interactive talks and question and answer processes by the teacher and other students regarding cultural differences.
- d) Reflection: Students are given the opportunity to have a response and reflect on other cultures that focus on interpretation.
- e) Responsibility: Students are expected to have an attitude of responsibility to develop cultural sensitivity, mutual respect, and tolerance to other cultures.

Promoting the Value of Tolerance in Learning English

There are many definitions of tolerance that are explained by various institutions or researchers. UNESCO as a culture-related organization, in 1995, defined tolerance as respect, acceptance, and appreciation for the rich diversity of the world's culture, forms of expression, and ways of human being. The definition was added by Tamring (2008) cited in Rahman & Khambali (2013) that today, tolerance refers to the willingness of individuals to establish relationships, and coexist with other individuals from different cultural and social backgrounds. This definition has clearly described that tolerance is an important attitude that must be owned and built in our social life. We will always relate and communicate with people from various cultures, especially with different language backgrounds, we will certainly have difficulty understanding both in culture and language.

Therefore promoting tolerance values in learning English is considered important based on two aspects of teaching, namely tolerance as one of the main values in education and tolerance as a basis for productive cross-cultural interactions (Levina et al, 2015). Each subject has the potential to teach tolerance, but foreign language learning (English) has the most favorable atmosphere for teaching tolerance. Learning can be applied to the method of intercultural language learning. The process of developing tolerance values is promoted starting from the teacher who gives ethics and tolerance behavior in the classroom and school environment. In addition, class activities that support students to be able to continue to develop and sharpen their tolerance potential with interactive discussions or the use of supporting media. In this way students can develop a tolerant attitude towards themselves, empathy and tolerance in

relationships with their classmates and teachers, and certainly in social life, today and in the future.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a case study research design with a qualitative approach. Case studies are in-depth, holistic and empirical analyzes of one case or phenomenon in a natural context (Nunan, 1992; Hood, 2009). This research is an in-depth analysis that focuses on the application of the phenomenon of the application of intercultural language learning in learning English. This study uses a qualitative approach based on supporting characteristics, namely using interactional mechanisms between researchers and respondents (Alwasilah, 2002: 60) and explores the phenomena that arises in the classroom as single and small cases.

Research Site and Participant

The subjects in this study were a teacher and 20 students of 6th grade elementary school in Karawang. There are a number of research considerations in selecting this location. First, the school is cooperative so that it is expected to support the researchers in conducting the research properly. Second, the English teachers in the school is quite enthusiastic to develop knowledge and capacity in teaching English is enthusiastic, especially in the application of intercultural language learning.

Data Collection Techniques

There are four types of data collection techniques that will be used in this study to meet the triangulation data obtained from various data collection techniques and sources. The four data

collection techniques are discussed as follows:

Observation

Observations are made based on observing the learning process directly in the classroom that allows researchers to see, observe, and record the activities and behaviors of research subjects in a natural context. The observation used was passive participatory observation, where the researcher did not participate in learning activities in the classroom. This observation was carried out 6 times in different meetings to get different and in-depth findings.

Interview

In this study interviews will be conducted by researchers to the teacher who teaches English and representatives of 6th grade students. This interview is very important to obtain information about the teacher's understanding of the concept of intercultural language learning, its application in the classroom, its influence on student character, especially tolerance. Interviews are conducted in a structured manner and it was still possible to respond to open-ended questions.

Documentation

In this study, to answer the research questions, data information obtained through observation, interviews, and questionnaires. Documentation was obtained through a list of grades and results of student assignments so it can be identified that how learning outcomes and developments in the attitude of student tolerance by using the method of intercultural language learning.

Data analysis

Data for this study were analyzed qualitatively. In general, data analysis was carried out in three phases of data transformation, namely description,

analysis, and interpretation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). All data taken from different collection methods were explained, analyzed and interpreted qualitatively. To answer the first research question about the application of intercultural language learning, the data was analyzed from observations and interviews. While the second research question about the development of students' tolerance values by learning English used observation data analysis, interviews and documentation.

Data Validation (Triangulation)

This study used data validation in the form of triangulation of data sources by collecting information obtained from various data collection techniques and sources or research subjects for data checking purposes. The researchers conducted observations, interviews, and documents analysis. This is done to avoid research bias through invalid and unreliable data. It is hoped that the varied techniques obtained valid data because it has passed triangulation phase. In addition, the researchers also compared observational data by cross-checking data among respondents (Fraenkel et. Al., 2011).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of intercultural English language learning to Elementary Students

Basically, Intercultural understanding can be taught to students in every level of education especially to young learners (elementary students). As Radic-Bojanic (2013) mentions that cultural diversity is an important concept to grasp during childhood because this understanding will enable children to embrace and value the things that make each person or group of people different. In this study, the implementation of intercultural English learning was done

partly and in no sequence following the principles of intercultural language learning (Liddicoat & Scarino (2013) that is a) Active construction, b) Making connection, c) Social interaction, d) Reflection, e) Responsibility. Furthermore, teaching intercultural understanding to young learners is quite difficult, and it needs fun activities to apply.

Young learners were not provided difficult material and complicated activities. The teacher used simple and fun material such as songs, poems, chants, children's stories and games in English, both from their own culture or the target culture. As it is stated by Savic (2013) that there are materials that can be used for bringing a target culture into the classroom such as authentic texts, audio and video material, much of which can be found on the Internet. Students can learn the use of English while recognizing cultural differences and their own language and the culture and target language. The materials were mostly taken from Lestiono et al's (2018) textbook that provide materials for teaching English to young learners. Furthermore, the activities of teaching and learning in the classroom are described into different ways and material including using song, short stories and game.

Teaching English using songs always becomes one of favourite activities by students especially the young learners. Students are more enthusiastic and the teaching and learning process is also fun and enjoyable. In the teaching, the teacher used song and video to introduce students about English vocabularies and the intercultural understanding. The song lyric sample can be seen below.

Thank You God

*Thank you God for feet that run
and hop, jump and have such fun.*

*Than you God for hands that clap,
wigggle, wave and pet a cat.
Thank you God for making me,
and mom and dad and friends
I see.
We love you, praise you and
shout out your name.
Our Gods is forever and ever the
same!*

(Lestiono et al, 2018)

The song above tells about expressing gratefulness to God in English culture. The students sing the song guided by the teacher. It can be seen that there are some target cultures in the song such as expressing gratefulness by saying “Thank you God” and “Our God is forever and ever the same!”. There is an intercultural value that can be taken in this phase. Students were given opportunity to connect their own culture and the target culture in term of expressing gratefulness. They tried to express it in their language and native culture (Indonesian language) such as “*Terimakasih Tuhan*” as “Thank you God” and “*Tuhan kita satu*” as “Our God is forever and ever the same”. The students were also given time to reflect and think about the differences guided by the teacher. In addition, the teacher also explained about diversity in believing God. In this phase, the students were told that they may have their own God to believe but they were also given the value to respect other God and religions. This is a phase of reflection where both students and teacher response and reflect on other cultures that focus on interpretation.

Furthermore, the activity was also done by telling native Indonesian short story. The short story itself comes from Kalimantan entitled “The Crocodile and the Dayak from East Kalimantan”. This story is about the fame of Dayak tribe from East Kalimantan for their expertise in hunting. They can even beat a crocodile with their intelligence. The

intercultural values learned from the story is students know one of Indonesian tribes and its story as well as comparing Dayak culture with Indian culture as American native. In this phase both students and teacher apply the principle of Making Connection and Social Interaction where they discuss the story and compare it with another story in other culture with their partner guided by the teacher.

In addition, teaching by using game is also liked by most students. One of games that was used by the teacher was “Attention Game”. The rule is quite easy as it is orderly done in these steps:

1. Call out commands such as: ‘Attention’, ‘salute’, march in place...stop’, ‘sit down’, ‘clap your hand’, etc.
2. At first, students copy the teacher
3. Later, students give commands to their friends.

By doing this activity, students learn English vocabulary with some expression such as doing command in English that is “Attention!” and “salute!”. In addition, the intercultural values that can be taken is they can perform native game in Indonesia then comparing them. In this phase both students and teacher applied the principle of social Interaction where they did activities that required interaction and pair work.

From all the activities above, it can be seen that the teacher implemented the intercultural English learning with different ways and activities. Mayesky (2008) in Radic-Bojanic (2013) suggests to incorporate cultural celebration as important items into a foreign language classroom because it is a very practical way to show students what is important to other cultures. The cultural celebrations can be learned by students from the target culture such as foods, music, art, and songs that have values in different culture. Teaching English, including introducing tolerance value to young

learners, is not easy since they need to be treated differently as adults. Thus, it required fun and interactive activities but it also still delivering the message of tolerance.

Promoting students' tolerance through Intercultural English Language Learning

In promoting tolerance to students in English learning, teachers need to make culture learning as an important element to make students aware of the importance of intercultural understanding. However, teacher does not require to completely understand the target culture (English) or having experience living abroad, but they just need to know basic culture knowledge and incorporate the target culture. Rodliyah & Muniroh (2012) suggests that teachers should be reminded that incorporating target culture does not mean to impose target cultural values or to change the students' value systems. Rather, it is aimed at developing awareness among students that they are part of a diverse community and thus cultural flexibility and tolerance are expected.

Furthermore, as it is cited from the teacher's interview, she mentioned that she actually does not quite understand how the English culture is, rather she just teaches English including the culture knowledge that she has already known. The teacher's statement can be seen in the vignette below:

"I don't really understand how to describe English culture, I don't have very good command of English culture. When I teach English culture to students, I just bring my set of beliefs about English culture. The most important thing is they know the culture of target language in order to foster their critical thinking and

character while they can learn English language. "

However, even in the situation above, the teacher still tried to deliver values from the learning activities. It can be seen from the discussion earlier that the teacher used various ways to teach English as well as delivering the message of intercultural values. The teacher involved students to be critical in thinking about the diversity. On the other hand, one important point is that the students are still very young so the topic and its discussion must be adapted to their age and thinking capacity because they cannot think like the adult does.

Students also gave their experience in learning English through intercultural learning. They stated that they were very happy with the learning process. They express their pleasure because they get to know other cultures and most importantly accept cultural differences as an admiration. Some of the students' comment are stated below:

"I am happy especially when singing songs and playing games"

"I know other (English) culture, different habit, different God"

"I know a story about culture from Indonesia and America (US)"

From the statement above, it can be seen that students like to learn English and its culture with various ways. They are given opportunity to know other (English) culture through different fun activities by using song and games. They also slightly show awareness of diversity by stating the differences of habit, story, and religion. It is supported by the teacher who gave them understanding to respect the differences among culture. It is in line with Levina et al (2015) that teaching tolerance values can create a tolerant attitude of students in an atmosphere of

mutual respect for one another. Students at a young age are fairly appropriate to be introduced cultural understanding of target language so that they can think critically about other culture.

Nevertheless, the students can not actually show their values on tolerance because that values cannot only be seen from their statement but they are reflected from their attitude. It is quite difficult to know how far they have understood and reflected on the learning activities into their daily life, but it can also be observed from their attitude during the teaching learning process and interview with them.

CONCLUSION

Teaching intercultural understanding is considerably appropriate to be introduced to students at elementary school in English subject. The effect is that they can think critically and have a tolerant nature from early age, but it must be adapted to their age and thinking capacity. The teacher does not need to be expert in understanding the target culture, at least they know the basic knowledge and general information. Teaching tolerance to young learners also does not mean to lecture them to act tolerant, but by showing them particular cases in target language by using fun and stimulating activities and media such as singing, telling short story, and playing games. Teaching tolerance to young learners in this research context is one of the main values in education, and not as a basis for productive cross-cultural interactions.

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