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INTEGRATING LOCAL CONTENTS IN ESSAY WRITING MATERIALS FOR
STUDENTS OF ENGLISH EDUCATION PROGRAM

AT IAIN PARE-PARE

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ABSTRACT

Integrating local contents in a course book has been an effort by some Indonesian teachers to keep up the culture of the country, prevent the negative effect of the western culture, and meet the students’ needs on materials (Prastiwi, 2016). This is also a response to the changes in the trend of learning English as the international language in the globalisation era which emphasize the language teaching on the learners’ context (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Relating to this issue, this study analyzes the role of curriculum to support the use of local contents in English learning at English Education Study Program of IAIN Parepare. The study also discusses the students’ perceptions on the use of local contents in essay writing course book. The study takes the curriculum of English education study program of IAIN Parepare and the students as the sources of information. The research employs questionnaire as an instrument to get data on the students’ perceptions. The result of the study shows that the curriculum supports and guides the use of local contents in English learning. It is proved by the statement of the mission of the English language education study program in the curriculum that is to develop English language learning that integrates Islam and local content wisdom, intellectual and emotional intelligences, as well as spiritual intelligence based on research and information technology. Analysis of the students’ perceptions also indicates that they perceive English learning through local contents positively.

Keywords: local contents, English learning, curriculum, students’ perceptions

INTRODUCTION

For some decades, English learning all over the world has been identical to learning the target language culture. To master the language, students are encouraged to the English language exposure, which includes learning not only the grammatical aspects of the language but also the culture of the language. The situation also happens in Indonesia. The course books present the culture of English native speakers through the teaching of language skills. In a reading course book, for example, learners are exposed to the reading texts that tell the western context such as the four seasons, western agricultural farming, western folktales, and the like. Similarly, in writing, students are assigned to write topics that are sometimes unfamiliar to them. The same case goes to other skills, listening and speaking.

Recently, some efforts have been done to reconstruct a new thought on the teaching and learning English as the international language (EIL). In the field of language research, the scholars encouraged the need to conduct a research on the uniqueness of teaching and learning English in non-native English countries (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). In the field of language learning, scholars argue that the goal of learning English is achieving intelligibility (Canarajah, 2007; cited in Faris, 2015). To gain the goal, the scholars suggest integrating the local culture of the learner in the course book. This effort is advantageous to help learner and teacher realize that English is not only the
language of people of America and British, but is also their own, thus “they can internalize the language to tell about their own culture and condition” (Sherman, 2010; Mckay, 2003; cited in Faris, 2015). The change of the learning goal is then implemented in the development of course books that integrate the local culture of the learner (McGrath, 2002; Hermawan and Noerkhasanah, 2012; Elgar, 2012; cited in Faris, 2015).

In Indonesia, the contextualization of teaching and learning English as the target language is crucial for some purposes: to maintain the culture of the country, prevent the negative effect of the western culture, and meet the students’ needs on materials related to their own culture. The contextualization also includes the integration of the local culture in the materials which in forms of the use of local folktales, as many found in the English textbooks for primary students (Prastiwi, 2016).

This study also deals with the integration of local contents in essay writing materials for EFL students at IAIN Parepare. Specifically, this study analyzes the role of the curriculum as the guide in the English learning, the use of local contents-based materials in teaching and learning, and the students’ perception on the use of the materials. The local contents-based materials used in this study are two chapters of a course book developed by the researchers to be used for the essay writing course at IAIN Parepare. The materials discuss the topics of culture and religion. The findings of the study might enhance the previous research findings that students’ native culture can be a tool to learn the target language (Prastiwi, 2016).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Materials in EFL Teaching

Although Tomlinson (1998) states that materials is “anything which is used to help to teach language” textbook or course book is probably the most well-known form of materials. Some teachers use published course book for practicality while others take some texts and exercises from some course books and use them to supplement their own materials (Cunningsworth, 1987).

Even though Cunningsworth (1987) argues that published course book has some strengths as they were written by the experienced writers and were carefully used to test the effectiveness in real teaching, other scholars criticize such books as only transferring the culture of the English people (Rashidi, 2011). Likewise, the use of textbooks that show off the English culture sometimes has no benefits in the process of learning, due to the unfamiliarity of the concept to the students learning context (Bell and Gower in Tomlinson, 1998). Rinvulcri (1999; cited in Rashidi, 2011) also argues that those textbooks only portray the culture of the English people, and do not cover the context of the learners’ life, thus make learners uncritical to the realities of their own society. In this sense, the integration of the learners’ culture in EFL learning becomes urgent.
2.2 EFL Teaching in Indonesia

In Indonesia, the teaching of English as the international language has been the concern of the government for a long time. English then become the international language taught from the primary school level until university level. While in the primary school level English is an optional subject, in the secondary level English becomes a compulsory subject and one of the subjects tested in the national examination. In this level, the mastery of English becomes crucial for students to help them pass the examination. In the university level, the teaching of English is mainly intended to help students to understand textbooks which are mainly written in English.

Although English teaching has been started from the very basic level until university, the effort does not show satisfactory result yet. Based on some research on English language learning in Indonesia (Lowenberg, 1991; Lee, 2007), it is found that English language competence of high school and university graduates is commonly in low level. One of the factors contributing to the failure is the curriculum which does not meet the needs of the learners (Lowenberg, 1991). Another factor might be the teaching instructional materials that fail to motivate students to learn because they are not challenging and are irrelevant to the students’ context (Gufron, 2015).

RESEARCH METHOD

This is a qualitative study in which the data were collected from the curriculum of the English Education Study Program of IAIN Parepare and forty-two students of English Education Program in academic year 2007/2018. To get research data on the curriculum, the document was read and analyzed. To get data on the students’ perceptions, they were taught essay writing by using a course book that integrated writing and reading skills in which two of the chapters were about local contents of culture and religion. After being taught using the course book, they were asked to perceive the learning by responding to a questionnaire. The questionnaire was in the form of Likert Scale, consists of ten items, and comprised of four options each, namely strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

The data got from the curriculum were qualitatively interpreted to find out the role of the curriculum in English learning at English education study program of IAIN Parepare. The data taken from the questionnaire will be statistically analyzed to find out the frequency and the mean score of the students’ level of perceptions and will be then qualitatively interpreted to find out the tendency of the students’ perceptions towards the use of local content-based course book.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

A. The Role of the Curriculum

The curriculum applied in IAIN Parepare is based on KKNI (National Qualifications Framework Indonesia). This is the skeleton hierarchy qualification that can reconcile, equalize, and integrate the outcomes of formal education, non-formal, informal, and / or work experience in the
context of recognition of the competence of work in accordance with the structure of work in various sectors, and the type and level of higher education. According to curriculum document (2018), the KKNI is structured with the aim of ensuring the accountability of education providers in the equality of graduates' competencies in accordance with their education level. Another goal is to ensure the achievement of quality education in Indonesia is at the same level as the quality of education in other countries.

The curriculum consists of some components that guide the learning such as vision, mission, and goal of the institution. At the English education study program of IAIN Parepare, the curriculum of the study program guides the teaching and learning process conducted by lecturers and students. Specifically, the study program vision, missions, and goal will determine what courses prepared for the students, and the number of courses that students take in order to complete their study, and for the lecturers, the curriculum guides them to develop syllabuses and selecting materials used for teaching.

There are three components of the curriculum that are important to discuss in this research: vision, missions, and goal. Firstly, as stated in the document, the vision of the English education study program of IAIN Parepare is to become a qualified program study in *tridarma* (the three obligations of university in Indonesia) development in learning English with Indonesian character. As inferred by the statement, the study is expected to conduct the three actions to develop English learning, in which the English learning stated here is the one that has a specific character. The specific character here might mean the learning of English that includes the local wisdom of the country.

Secondly, the missions of the study also become the guide in English learning. The study program has several missions and one of the missions clearly stated the importance of the integration of local contents in the learning. The mission is “developing English language learning that integrates Islam and local culture wisdom, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence and the English language which are research and information technology as the basis” (Curriculum document, 2018).

Thirdly, the goal of the study program states that the study program is expected to take actions to implement English language learning that integrates Islam and utilizes local culture wisdom, in which research and information technology as the basis. This statement also reinforces the inclusion of local contents in the effort to conduct teaching and learning at English study program of IAIN Parepare.
B. Students` Perceptions on the Use of Local Contents

Students` perceptions on the use of local contents in learning essay writing are revealed by analyzing their responses to the questionnaire. Through ten statements in the questionnaire, the researchers tried to find out the level of the appealing of the cultural and the religious contents, the enjoyment of the learning, students` motivation to write the cultural and religious contents, the degree of the challenge of the contents, and the difficulty of the learning through the two contents.

The result of the analysis is showed in table 1 below. The table indicates that the students have good perceptions of the use of the local contents (i.e. cultural and religious) contents in the learning. As shown in the table, of forty-two students, most of them agree that learning essay writing through cultural content is appealing. Accordingly, most of them agree that learning essay writing through religious content is appealing, even though the score is lower than learning through cultural content.

In addition, students enjoy learning essay writing through cultural content as shown in the table. Likewise, most of them enjoy learning through religious content, even though the score is less than learning through cultural content.

The students` positive perceptions were also clearly showed in their motivation in learning through both cultural and religious contents. They admit that they become motivated to write a cultural essay. Accordingly, they become motivated to write an essay with religious content.

Moreover, the students find the local contents are challenging. Most of them perceive that cultural content is challenging. Their positive perception also goes to the religious content, even though the score is lower.

Finally, most of the students think that they do not find difficulty in learning essay writing through cultural and religious contents. The response is clearly shown in the table.

To sum up, the students perceive learning English through local contents positively. They agree that learning English through local contents is appealing, enjoying, motivating, and challenging. Therefore, they agree that they find no difficulty in learning English through local contents.

Table 1. Students` Perception of the Use of the Local Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree (4)</th>
<th>Agree (3)</th>
<th>Disagree (2)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Cultural content is appealing to me.</td>
<td>4 (9.52)</td>
<td>35 (83.33)</td>
<td>1 (2.39)</td>
<td>2 (4.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Islamic content is appealing to me.</td>
<td>14 (33.33)</td>
<td>26 (61.91)</td>
<td>2 (4.76)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I enjoy learning writing through cultural topics.</td>
<td>10 (23.80)</td>
<td>30 (71.42)</td>
<td>1 (2.39)</td>
<td>1 (2.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I enjoy learning writing through religious topics.</td>
<td>10 (23.80)</td>
<td>28 (66.68)</td>
<td>2 (4.76)</td>
<td>2 (4.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I become motivated to write cultural topics.</td>
<td>6 (14.28)</td>
<td>32 (76.20)</td>
<td>2 (4.76)</td>
<td>2 (4.76)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This result supports the previous research findings that learning the second/foreign language is an alternative tool to teach the local culture of the learner (Prastiwi, 2013). This result also shows that using the local contents might be a trend in teaching and learning English as English now is not only the first or the second/foreign language but also the international language in which people the entire world claim that it is their own language (Sherman, 2010; Mckay, 2003; cited in Faris, 2015).

**CONCLUSION**

The research suggests several conclusions as stated as follows:

1. The curium of the English study program supports the integration of local contents in the learning English. The main components of the curriculum (i.e. vision, missions, and goal) clearly state the role of the curriculum as the guide in the integration. The curriculum defines the local contents as the Islamic contents and the local culture contents.

2. Students perceived the learning through the use of local contents in the course book as a positive thing. Specifically, they agree that the contents are appealing, motivating, challenging, enjoyable, and therefore they find no difficulty in learning through the contents.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


