

# **Bringing Local and Islamic Values in the English Teaching Method of UIN Sunan Kalijaga<sup>1</sup>**

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## **A. Introduction**

Learning a foreign language can't be seen as a 'myopic isolated' in which a certain knowledge only based on its certain field of study. A recent method of learning such as English as a second language has already focused on constructive theory, a multidisciplinary approach which combine some paradigms such as linguistic, psychology, and sociology<sup>2</sup>. In this sense, there are many aspects like socio-cultural involved, not only for the richness and comprehensive understanding of the teaching itself, but also for conducting an interesting method of English teaching –learning as a foreign language.

Since IAIN changed into UIN Sunan Kalijaga, this campus has transformed into a an integrated-interconnected university which's not only implied in its vision but also in its policy and curricula. This concept is like a multidisciplinary in which a graduate of UIN Sunan Kalijaga should be able to know and introduced both Islam and 'secular' knowledge. To support this policy, one of the mission is to obligate students getting at least 400 score of TOEFL for the under-graduate program before they graduate from their faculties.

One of this implementation is a centralization of language teaching. Since 2008, this university has conducted a centralized Arabic and English in which all students from all faculties must take an English and Arabic class in the Centre for the Language, Culture and Religion (Pusat Bahasa, Budaya dan Agama – PBBA). The classes are held in the first year of their study, which's supposed to be their basic English knowledge before

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<sup>1</sup> Delivered in "The International Colloquium on Language Teaching Methods", UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 20 November 2013,

<sup>2</sup> Brown, H. Douglas. 2007. Prinsip Pembelajaran dan Pengajaran Bahasa. Pearson Education, Inc. p 13

continuing it in their own faculty. Conducted in the form course training, students will have around 42 meeting or three times a week in one semester

Though the course is kind of general English, the multidisciplinary studies are indeed necessary to be implemented in the curricula of PBBA. Thus, since the beginning, this institution has been trying to bring a local value and Islamic perspective in the English teaching method, in which after taking this kind of course, students are intended to have a different kind of milieu and comprehension.

The purpose of this strategy is not only to make English seems to be more down to earth, in which students will discuss things that are more familiar and close to their own tradition but also as media of comparison, from one culture to another. However, to implement this kind of tradition is not as easy as it looks. The students capacity, facilities and instructors capability in modifying and implementing the curricula are ones of barriers that should be coped with.

Besides, although English is often considered as a 'profane' or 'secular', it doesn't mean that in the learning and teaching process it can't be modified with local tradition or even Islamic milieu. As an universal language, English is very compatible to be modified, adjusted, with any kind of situation and condition. The application of this method is not only on the level of philosophy, but also on the practical level

#### B. UIN Sunan Kalijaga's case

Students who enter this college are classified as medium in terms of language skills, especially English. Although the classes are then divided into various levels based on their abilities, but from the beginning, the concentration of teaching at this institution is at the upper basic to pre advance level. Thus, in the practice of teaching, language instructors should still focus on a comprehensive understanding of basic English rather than integrated them to local values.

Based on research conducted by PBBA in 2012 for example, such difficulty in understanding materials, especially grammar is a problem that is felt by the students,

beside methodological learning which seems to be monotonous and not varied.<sup>3</sup> This indicates that, in a quite limited meeting, integration of English with local values and Islam is certainly not an easy thing, especially for students with very basic capabilities.

However, this is indeed a challenge for this institution, to harmonize with the goals to be achieved. In this sense, a language teaching-learning does not only focus on the methodological level which is strict and structured, but also can be integrated at the philosophical or practical level, a new teaching learning model that can be developed.

- Philosophical Level

Philosophical level is supposed to be the basic understanding of teaching methodology. This give such a direction how the goal of the study is. To learn English as a second or third language, students in fact have a basic understanding of their local tradition or religion first. Thus to integrate them with English language is supposed to be not difficult. They have already had a frame of Islamic/tradition mind far more than they know about English. As a Muslim, for example, students at least have a mindset or way of thinking is Islamic, which then has implications for the way -and the practical things done. In the Oral Comprehension class for instance, when a student of UIN is asked to talk about their daily activities in English, then the activities of five daily prayers or reciting Quran will be mentioned or become topic that can be discussed. In a similar way, when they were invited to talk about the family's background or social culture, the Islamic ritual and matters related to it will be something warm discussion. Thus, references related to the study of Islam or Islamic practice activities are needed to enrich the English language students.

In a similar way, local tradition has certainly been rooted the student's life even though he learns new things in his daily, including English. In this case, when a person learns something new like a foreign language, for example, it certainly does not mean that he

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<sup>3</sup> Shofiyullah, M.Z. *Strategi Penguatan Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab dan Inggris di Pusat Bahasa, Budaya dan Agama, UIN Sunan Kalijaga*, Lembaga Penelitian UIN Sunan Kalijaga 2012

adopts fully on what is learned, but rather doing such a process of 'justifying' with what he had had before. Thus, when learning English, adjusting to local cultures is actually a part of the method that must be developed. Like the British-English, American-English or Australian English which of course have differences between one to another, then when the local value is developed, there will be an Indonesian-English, English with Indonesian flavored

- Practical level

At the level of practice, the teachers are in fact deal with a bunch materials which are usually in English linguistic structure and culture. In this level, students usually do not only learn about the linguistic but culture as well. As Al-Seghayer suggested, without cultural insight and skill, even fluent speakers can seriously misinterpret messages they have read, and the messages they intend to communicate can be misunderstood. This is because students do not fully comprehend the essential framework in which language functions, namely culture; as a result, cultural competence should be encouraged at all stages. Related to this point is that learning English without its culture often results in learning meaningless linguistic symbols, and in using English inappropriately or in the wrong cultural context<sup>4</sup>. In this sense, what he's going to say is that it's quite impossible to separate these two things. Language and culture are connected in various ways. Language acquisition does not follow a universal linguistic sequence but rather differs across cultures. The process of assimilation into society involves the exchange of language in particular social situations: The native learner, in addition to learning the language, acquires linguistic patterns in his or her culture. Therefore, language and culture cannot be separated. Foreign language teaching should work toward language-in-culture and culture-in language teaching rather than seeking ways of teaching culture as a separate skill. Language and culture should be seen as constituting a single domain of experience.<sup>5</sup>

Considering of this package of learning, it's quite interesting for example to pose a question that is that possible to learn English without its culture? Or at least adjust or

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentid=20130129151084>

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

modify with the local tradition and value? The answer is certainly possible. As being explained above, learning a foreign language as long as its culture is such kind of additional knowledge in which they have already had their own local values. Learning a foreign language does not necessary means that adopting all about its culture. As Al-Seghayer suggested that teaching English cultural values merely raises the English language learners' awareness of the culture's social practices so that they can behave accordingly when relevant sociolinguistic situations occur. The practice of teaching English along with its culture is expected to widen the horizons of English language learners by exposing them to a new culture. This allows them to be more informed, in a better position to compare and contrast their own cultural values with those of others, and able to teach their own cultural values to others and defend them whenever needed.<sup>6</sup>

However, as being stated by Millrood in her research, the local tradition or value is one of the most essential condition to get the effective teaching- learning. It is because during the process of learning, teachers needs to adapt any technique of learning with the local situation, including the traditional values and wisdom. In this sense, instead of parting the traditional past, blending with the existing traditions is much helpful for the students to understand the foreign one especially English. As Millrood suggests, this can be done by the local teachers<sup>7</sup>

So far, in the case of Indonesian students, especially in UIN Sunan Kalijaga, modifying the local values or tradition is mostly applied in teaching English methods. The argument is that we have already been rich with our local ones which certainly not similar with those from the West. However, to remove all Western cultural references from English syllabi is also seemingly unwise and unreasonable. Student can learn both without confronting it each other. The reference materials of English teaching should be more flexible, in accordance with the needs or condition of a student. In this sense, all aspects of basic materials provided to students, can be integrated with the study of Islam or related to religious activities which are essential to enrich the student knowledge and comprehension. Some of possible methods can be through :

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<sup>6</sup> ibid

<sup>7</sup> <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Millrood-TeachersInRussia.html>

a. Reading Comprehension

From all aspects of linguistic field, readings comprehension is the widest flexible materials to be integrated with any kind of subject, including with Islamic studies or the local values which are considered to be the fundamental knowledge of Indonesian students, especially in UIN Sunan Kalijaga. So far, Reading material is usually associated with the activities from the Western society both in academic and cultural milieu. However, the integrated ones can be connected with the matters relating to the study of Islam or the Muslim world. For example, the Islamic World in Europe or America, History of Islam in the West, biography of Prophets or the Islamic Leaders, the development of Islamic Thoughts in the World, etc. With this range, students do not only learn about the theory of reading and vocabularies, but also the Islamic world and its development. In this case the student will learn that English is not only about things in the West, but also as a means for reading the world and its contents from various perspectives

b. Listening Comprehension

In Listening Comprehension, the integrated portion of Islamic studies or local values with English may not be as flexible as reading, because of the emphasis on this subject is more on pronunciation, spelling or understanding of how native speakers speak. However, the spirit of Islamic/local milieu or can be included in form of references, such as songs, speech, or films whose messages are in line with the local tradition or Islamic one. For instance, Islam as a religion of mercy can basically be seen and addressed from various aspects, like the environmental issues, tolerance, kindness, ethic, pluralism, etc.

c. Speaking

Speaking materials can be very varied, ranging from everyday life to problems of the nation or the world. With this breadth of topic, the integration is essentially not as difficult. For example, students can be invited to the informal discussion about Sharia law (as applied to him Aceh), political Islam, to issues

such as Hajj , the living in the *pesantren* etc . However, since discussion or conversation is in English these topics must be adapted to the ability of the student or vocabularies .

#### d. Writing

Almost similar with the Listening Comprehension , the local / Islamic references can only be applied to the examples of sentence themes / topics to be written . However, the direction or goal of this subject is essentially how to make students are able to put the ideas in English . English language is a medium for students to disseminate their ideas to be read by the international community . In a practical level , to the fourth aspect of the English language ,this is essentially the integrated one.

However, though at the level of methodology this kind of integration certainly cannot be imposed too, student has a wide exploration to connect one to the other things. All aspects above essentially contribute to enrich student's knowledge though the formula has not testified yet. The most common problem is that the intersection is not too deep and confined to the surface. In this sense, it needs a lot of things to do, so much to be explored and implemented in order to have a better one .

#### C. Conclusion

The integration of the local values in teaching-learning methods of foreign language is not a new thing. To learn a certain language, like the English as a second language is not only about knowledge transferring from the source to the target language but emphasizing also to the social interaction which give a wider dimension of comprehension.

In the case of UIN Sunan Kalijaga, especially in PBBA where the foreign language teaching-learning is centralized, a problem of integration interconnection is still in struggling to compose its formula. Though the application of this integration can possibly be applied from the philosophical level to the practical one, but the

implementation is not such easy. The most problem is that the intersection is not too deep and only confined to the surface.

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