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THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL AWARENESS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

Indonesia is one of the biggest multucultural countries in the world. It has various ethnics, languages, religions, and cultures. Between four, there are two elements; Language and Culture that have close relationship. Some social scientist maintain that culture would not possible without language. On the other hand, language is influenced and shaped by culture. Thus, language expresses culture, so learning a new language without familiarity with its culture remains incomplete understanding. The aim of this study is to describe the importance of cultural awareness in English Language Teaching. This is a literature review combining some sources of expert in the field of language and cultural awareness. The contribution of this study is to increase teacher and student understanding in cultural awareness especially in educational context in indonesia.

Keywords : Cultural Awareness, Language, English Language Teaching.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the biggest multucultural countries in the world. It has various ethnics, languages, religions, and cultures. Interaction among them is possibly happened. Moreover, In today's globe environment, geographical borders and boundaries are becoming unified. As a result, Culture becomes a part of human life.

When talking about culture, it refers to differences. A group of people has each traditions, customs, beliefs, values, artifacts, and languages. It indicates that cultures truly reflect diversity. In International setting, cultural diversity is unavoidable. It is applied in many fields, such as education, language,business, tourism, public services, and etc.

One of the most recent issues that discussed all around the world is culture dealing with language. Language is influenced and shaped by culture. On the other hand, we can say that studying new language is also studying its culture. In order to build comprehensive understanding, cultural awareness in studying new language is needed.

For further information, English is the most widely spoken language in the world. Studying English is very important since English is considered as a international language. It means, by studying English, all component of educational world should be aware in the culture of target language.

In the context of indonesia which applied English as their target language, understanding the culture of target language should be accompanied by understanding the culture of Indonesia. It will create cultural awareness, both in the target language and bahasa Indonesia.

Based on the explanation above, cultural awareness was very crucial in English Language Teaching (ELT). In conducting this study, the researchers combining some sources of expert in the field of language and cultural awareness. The discussion will be shown in the next chapter.

2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

The concept of culture was firstly defined by E.B.Tylor in 1871 on printing. He was the first to provide a scientific definition of the term. According to Tylor (1924), culture is “That complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”. (E.B. Tylor : 1924). Accoring to Hudson, culture is knowledge that someone has by virtue of his being a member of a particular society. (Hudson : 1980)

The definition above is obvious that each culture belongs to each group. It means that each group has each rule of culture because culture in one group is different from others. The differences indicate the existences of different culture. In other words, Culture is the characteristics of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, social habits, music and arts.

In contrast with the word culture which has many different meanings, the definition of language are not difficult to find. According to Sapir, "language is a purely human and non-instintive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols". (Sapir : 1921). In line with Sapir, Bloch & Trager define " A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group co-operates". (Bloch & Trager : 1942)

From those definition, we can conclude that by using language, someone could make statements, convey knowledge, explain or report something, and keep social relations among the language users. It means that people can express their ideas, feeling and information through communication. Of course, language plays an important role in human life.

Language and Culture have close relationship. Language is influenced and shaped by culture. Some social scientist maintain that culture would not possible without language. So, language is the product of culture.

3. CULTURAL AWARENESS

Tomlinson (2001) says that cultural awareness involves a gradually developing inner sense of the equality of cultures, an increased understanding of your own and other people's cultures, and a positive interest in how cultures both connect and differ (cited in Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2004, p. 3). If we lack the culture awareness, we will get problem when we face cross culture interaction. It is simply that before we exactly want to know others, it is better for us to understand our culture first. It supports us to have deep understanding about culture where we belong including who we are, where we come from and how culture impact on us. As a result, by having self awareness we can know the norm

which one is good and which one is bad. It also encourages us to have broaden thinking, empathy and sensitivity to other culture. According to Tomalin and Stempleski (1993), cultural awareness encompasses three qualities: awareness of one's own culturally-induced behavior, awareness of the culturally-induced behavior of others, ability to explain one's own cultural standpoint .

To build cultural awareness and sensitivity, we need to recognize and explore the range of cultural influences that impact on us as individuals or group members, develop an awareness and understanding of our own basic values, attitudes, assumptions and behaviours ; learn to recognize our cultural 'red flags' - the labels we apply to people from different cultures when we are faced with unexpected or apparently inappropriate behavior ; learn to recognize our own personal and emotional reactions to ambiguity and uncertainty.

a. recognizing and exploring the range of cultural influences that impact on us as individuals or group members

   Culture relates with the country in which individuals were born and raised. Anyhow, other social groups may also have different cultures that influence individual value, attitude and behavior. Other groups that depending on the context such as region, gender, age or generation, profession, job function, organization, religion and many other groups have an impact on who they are. Individuals can develop cultural sensitivity by identifying who they are, where they come from, what their religions are, what their professions are, etc. Individuals will know and have understanding about cultural affiliation that will influence their individual values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors in any given situation.

b. developing an awareness and understanding of our own basic values, attitudes, assumptions and behaviors

   Cultural misunderstanding can occur based on our own unconscious core values and those of others. It is very important having our own basic beliefs , attitudes, assumptions and behaviors in order to compare our values with those that others have.

c. learning to recognize our cultural 'red flags' - the labels we apply to people from different cultures when we are faced with unexpected or apparently

inappropriate behavior. It can be positive; such as they are so hospitable or negatives; such as they are rude and so on. They are called red flags because they should be warning us that culture may provide the best explanation for what we see. We need to conduct further analysis to really understand the situation we are in and the people we are with. Looking for parallels between our own culture and the culture we are dealing with is one useful strategy when detect a 'red flag'.

d. learning to recognize our own personal and emotional reactions to ambiguity and uncertainty. We will never know what exactly the culture is if we do not ever conduct investigation about the culture itself. Anyhow, we must prepare common emotional reaction such as stress and anxiety to the ambiguity present in cross-cultural situations. Learning our reactions to stress, and how to recognize these reactions in time to respond to them, are important elements in developing cultural sensitivity. We must aware Nevertheless, there are three questions that we apply can to balance the stressful situation. They are: How productive have these types of response been for us? How productive are they likely to be for us?, and How can we begin manage them effectively?

4. CULTURAL AWARENESS AND ELT

English as in international language has been taught in many countries such as Indonesia. Teaching English as the first foreign language face many challenges such as culture. Most of the teachers consider that culture is one of the most challenging aspect in teaching language. Actually, the problem can be can avoided if they place culture and language in a good porportion.

Culture: a Bridge or a Barrier

Culture and Teaching foreign language is not a new topic. There are many researchers that have studied about this topic for recent years. Teaching foreign language means facing two different culture (culture from target language and culture from the student). In teaching process, it is appearing problem whether culture of target language should be used in comunication. Whereas, in Indonesia, there are many teachers who are non native-speaker.

They should be have high profesionalisme in delivering the material of foreign language using target culture communication. It will be an obstacle for the student in learning foreign language because they will find many unfamiliar and uncomfortable aspect of target language. In contrast, if the non-native teacher apply students'culture background to build communicate in learning process, the student will be easier to understand, but it will take risk in acquiring foreign language incompletely. (Jin and Cortazzi: 2010).

The solution of the problem above is the student should know the key concept of studying language. Studying language is studying culture because culture and language are two aspects that have close relationship. Culture can be a bridge or a barrier in teaching english as foreign language. It depends on what point we want to strengthen. In simply, the teacher should notice the culture of target language and the culture that learners bring.

Teachers in Multicultural Education

Multicultural education cannot be separated from Indonesia because Indonesia is one of the biggest multicultural country in the world. This situation requires educators and administrators especially teachers to know more about diversity in unity. This concept was known as Indonesian identity for many years but the implementation in educational field has to be improved. The teachers as the role model of education should enhance the students' undertanding about multicultural education. They can learn from what teachers do and what teachers say. This have bigger influence toward students' understanding about what multicultural eduation is.

Nito in Osturgut explained that diversity in culture has caused teachers to recognize and enhance their comprehension of multicultural education As the effect, the need of multicultural education become very urgent (Osturgut: 2011). In line with nito explanation, Smith asserted that multicultural education can be success if the are good collaboration between teachers and the administrators. The preparation of teaching and learning need should be effective. They should pay attention in different need of students. The student needs will be vary depends on their cultural background (Osturgut: 2011).

"Teachers need to develop reflective cultural and national identifications if they are to function effectively in diverse classrooms and help students from different cultures and groups to construct clarified identifications" (Banks: 2001). In addition, Banks maintains that teacher should implement knowledge construction about cultural understanding Students have to understand "how knowledge is created and how it is influenced by the racial, ethnic, social-class, and gender positions of individuals and groups" (Banks: 2001).

It can be concluded that teachers are the practician of multicultural education. They should have good comprehension about multicultural education. They not only encourage the student to know their cultural identity but also understand what actually students need. In simply, teachers play important role in implementing multicultural education successfully.

The Importance of Cultural Awareness in ELT

According to Jin and Cortazzi, "learning a foreign langauge implies a degree of intercultural learning: student may be led to become more aware of their own culture in the process of learning about another and hence may be in a better position to develop intercultural skill" (Jin and Cortazzi: 2010)

Futhermore, cultural awareness that want to be emphasized in classroom activity is intepretive aspect such as behaviour and interaction (Jin and Cortazzi: 2010). It means that in the process of developing cultural awareness, students should build their willingness to learn the norm and the attitude of English. Then it will be a good synergy in intercultural learning.

Byram and Fleming state that "...without cultural awareness, a language cannot be properly understood" (Byram and Fleming: 2010). It is in line with Des's statement. He said in Byram and Fleming that students should be aware with the people who speak the language because without cultural dimension, it will not be an succesful communication. In addition, conveying the message of information will be faild because of the uncomprehensive understanding. (Byram and Fleming: 2010).

It can be conclude that cultural awareness plays an important to make a successful multicultural education. both of teacher and student should have

the awareness of culture. Teacher can guide the student to understand the culture of target language, while student can open mind in receiving the new culture of target language without sided their background culture.

5. CONCLUSION

Language is the product of culture that has close relationship. It should be taught by teachers effectively. Teachers are the practician of education that should have good comprehension about multicultural education. They not only encourage the student to know their cultural identity but also understand what actually students need. Both of teacher and student should have cultural awareness because it plays important role in implementing multicultural education. Teacher can guide the student to understand the culture of target language, while student can open mind in receiving the new culture of target language without sided their background culture.

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Biodata



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