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Language Teaching In Cross Cultural Communication Context

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Sekolah Tinggi Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan

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Bilingualism in Different Cultures and the Application to English Teaching 77-85

Dr. Yefiza, M.Pd

College of Teacher Training and Education – West Sumatera

The Importance of Understanding of Socio-Cultural Context in Language Teaching 86-92

Dr. Nihileni, M.Pd

Academy of Foreign Languages – Alaska, Bukittinggi

Retrieving Minangkabau Culture in EFL Learning to Write 93-98

Bernal, S.Pd, M.Pd

State Institute of Islamic Studies – Imam Bonjol, Padang

Improving Students' Cross Culture Understanding through Translation Activities 99-104

Olivia Julia, S.Pd, M.Pd

Padang State Poly-technique, West Sumatera

Using Error Correction Feedback to Improve Students' English Writing Problem Pertaining to the Indonesian Writing Style 105-113

Hertinausti, M.Ed

Gunung Kuning University – Riau

Room B

Making Use of Students' Multilingual and Multicultural Background in an ESP Classrooms 114-123

Dr. Yenni, M.Pd

Padang State University

Teaching English Based on Multicultural Awareness 124-135

Dr. Zulfariati, M.Pd

Mahaputra Muhammad Yamin University, Solok, West Sumatera

Teaching Writing to Indonesian EFL Students – Challenges of the "Voice" and "Style" in Adjusting Cross Cultural Communication Skills 136-147

Syrial Samsi Sukandi, S.S, M.A

College of Teacher Training and Education of West Sumatera

Feedback in ESL and EFL Contexts to Students' English Writings and Some Cultural Implication to Teaching English as a Foreign Language 148-156

Yen Priada, M.Pd

College of Foreign Languages – Prayoga, Padang

Changing Cultural Paradigm in Learning a Foreign Language 157-167 ✓

Dr. Sarwati Hendriani, M.Pd

State Institute of Islamic Studies, Padang

Study of An Initial Investigation into the Potential Utilization of Self-Access Centers (SACs) to Promote English Learning 168-179

Hindro Saptopramono, M.Ed

Padang State Poly technique

Mother Tongue Interference in the Writing of Indonesian EFL Students 180-188
Syahdan, M.Pd
Lancang Kuning University, Riau

**Code Switching between Informal Indonesian and English Exhibited by
the Speech of the Students at English Education Department FKIP
UnilakPekanbaru** 189-206
Marwa, S.PdI, M.A
Lancang Kuning University, Riau

SUPPLEMENTAL PAPERS

**Some Ways in Building Students' Cross Cultural Awareness through
Reading** 207-216
Dra. Arwina Dharma, M.A
Andalas University, Padang

Teaching Reading Skills and Strategies in Indonesian Context 217-227
Mehyann Melani, S.S, M.Pd
State College of Islamic Studies - Bukittinggi

CHANGING CULTURAL PARADIGM IN LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Dr. Suswati Hendriani, M.Pd
State Institute of Islamic Studies, Padang

ABSTRACT

Learning a foreign language can be frustrating and boring for those who cannot reach learning success. On the other hand, it can be exciting and interesting if the result is as expected. Unfortunately, the expectation is really difficult to be reached. Changing a language learning failure to the opposite side seems impossible for those who just rely on their teacher. In fact, it is generally believed that learners' success is in the hands of their teacher. There will be no learning without a teacher. As a result, the English teacher is the first one to be blamed for the learners' failure. This brand image of cultural paradigm of language learning is misleading. Therefore, a change in the culture of language learning paradigm should be made since the teacher is not the most important factor. It is the learners themselves who are the most important ones. Inasmuch as learning can take place anywhere, while the teacher is not always around, it is time to rely on the learners themselves. Others cannot help much. It is they who can change the feelings of frustration and boredom into those of excitement and interest. To do so, the language learners should be encouraged to find and apply their own language learning strategies. This article discusses about the importance of changing cultural paradigm in learning a foreign language in order to get better results or learning success.

Keywords: Cultural Paradigm, Learning, Foreign Language

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language can be frustrating and boring for those who cannot reach learning success. On the other hand, it can be exciting and interesting if the result is as expected. Unfortunately, the expectation is really difficult to be reached. Changing a language learning failure to the opposite side seems impossible for those who just rely on their teacher. In fact, it is generally believed that learners' success is in the hands of their teacher. There will be no learning without a teacher. As a result, the English teacher is the first one to be blamed for the learners' failure. This brand image of cultural paradigm of language learning is misleading. Therefore, a change in the culture of language learning paradigm should be made since the teacher is not the most important factor. It is the learners themselves who are the most important ones. Inasmuch as learning can take place anywhere, while the teacher is not always around, it is time to rely on the learners themselves. Others cannot help much. It is they who can change the feelings of frustration and boredom into those of excitement and interest. To do so, the language learners should be encouraged to find and apply their own language learning strategies.

This paper discusses about the importance of changing cultural paradigm in learning a foreign language in order to get better results or learning success.

CULTURAL PARADIGM OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN INDONESIAN CONTEXT

Learner-centered approach by idea has been long accepted. Yet, the reality is different from the acceptance. The teaching of English as a foreign language still rely too much on the teacher. There is a "brand image" in the minds of some foreign language learners that they will not and cannot learn without their teachers. It is the duty of the English teachers to explain the lessons to the learners (spoon-feeding). The learners think and expect that their teachers will meet their need in their English language learning if the teacher explains the lesson. There is a big hope for the teacher's attendance just to start learning. Therefore, if there is no teacher, there will be no learning.

The same thing is true in the minds of some English teachers. They think that their students need their help in every single step of their learning. As a result, the teachers, with all their effort, try to control the students' English learning over time. "A role that is sometimes expected in traditional educational institutions is that of "master controller" always in charge of every moment in the classroom". In fact, the teacher can play many roles, as director, manager, facilitator, and/or resource (Brown, 1994: 160-161). By teachers' playing those roles,

the students will have more chance to expose themselves to the new language they are learning. Language exposure might be helpful to reach success in their language learning.

Both the language learners and the teachers must realize that the learners' English learning success can only be reached if the language learners themselves realize the important role that they can play. Wenden and Rubin (1987: 19) support that the learner is the key to successful language learning. However, they implicitly suggest the influence of other variables. They affirm that some variables can contribute to the success of learners: their behaviors and their thought processes in the process of learning. Moreover, Rubin and Thompson (1982), and Brown (2000: 114) emphasize the learner variables as the key to success. The fact shows that good language learners have different characteristics from those unsuccessful ones (Stern, 1980; and Willing, 1988).

Unfortunately, the factors other than foreign language learners are often considered as more crucial factors than those of the language learners themselves, and are usually treated as the scapegoat for the students' failures in English language learning. For Rubin and Thompson (1982: 4-11), among the factors influencing successful foreign language learning are age, positive traits and effective strategies. Dickinson (in Oxford, 1990: 10) states "language learning strategies encourages overall self-direction for learners". "Self-direction is particularly important for language learners because they will not always have the teacher around to guide them as they use the language outside the classroom" (Oxford, 1990: 10).

Based on the description above, it is clear that the cultural paradigm of English teaching and learning is still teacher-centred in the application level.

WHY SHOULD CULTURAL PARADIGM BE CHANGED?

Byram and Hofstede in Finkbeiner, 2008: 137 state "Quality of teaching and learning cannot be standardized across cultures since it is relative. Yet, the characteristics of good language learners seem to be the same across cultures. Therefore, whatever the foreign languages being learned, the teachers need to help the language learners to be more successful as reflected in their characteristics.

There are several reasons for changing the cultural paradigm of teacher-centred practice. *First*, language learners are not passive subjects. The fact shows that some students seemed to be successful regardless of teaching method and appeared to use a variety of learning strategies in their learning to help themselves (Tarone and Yule, 1989; and Brown, 1994). Chamot (2008: 276) states that "no one method can reach every student"-and, therefore, instruction should be learner-centred. She also emphasizes the importance of culture and learning context on strategy instruction as a tool to provide learners with means of achieving success in language learning.

Second, culturally-based beliefs and attitudes affect students' motivation, and therefore their use of language learning strategies and their ultimate language performance (Oxford, 1996: 248). Learning is very influenced by culture (Finkbeiner (2008: 137). The culture as well as other learner variables determine whether a language learner has a strong drive to communicate and to learn from communication or not, whether learners are inhibited or not, whether and how much they practice and so on. Therefore, "to successfully teach languages to children and adults of different cultures, ethnicities, and/or nationalities, teachers need to become familiar with various methods for teaching diverse populations and develop a strong knowledge and empathy for learners".

Third, Second language acquisition research has begun to reaffirm the importance of the learner, not just the teacher (Larsen-Freeman, 1991).

Fourth, "A fundamental pedagogical principle in promoting learner-regulated motivation rather than teacher-regulated motivation is that learning needs to be driven by learners' own personal needs, goals, and interests (Ushioda, 2008: 27). Erhman (2007: 70) points out "motivated individuals can become good language learners."

Fifth, individual learners variables are important factors in students' success. Moreover, according to Norton and Toohey (2001: 318), it depends on "the contexts in which individuals learn".

Sixth, Cotterall (2008: 119) points out that learners differ in motivations, cultures, beliefs, learning strategies, styles, goals, age, aptitude, gender, and personality and, therefore, they respond differently to different methods and tasks. As a result, teachers need to accept the heterogeneity of their learners.

Seventh, learners have a strong drive to culture and culture influences whether learners are inhibited or not and it shapes attitudes towards the role of giftedness. Bedell and Oxford (1996: 60) point out "Learners often—though not always—behave in certain culturally approved and socially encouraged ways as they learn". Oxford (1996: x) suggests "The less conscious cultural aspects often influence how people learn languages". Oxford, Hollaway, and Horton-Murillo in Oxford (1996: x) emphasize "Although culture is not the single determinant, and although many other influences intervene, culture often does play a significant role in the learning styles (and strategies) ...adopted by many participants in the culture".

Based on the above ideas, it is understandable and reasonable why the cultural paradigm in English language teaching needs to be changed.

WHAT IS NEEDED FOR THE NEWPARADIGM?

In order that the language learners gain success in their foreign language learning, the English teachers can use the following guidelines:

First, they need to pay attention to the questioning techniques applied. There are six criteria for effective questioning based on Cambridge University Press:

1. Clarity

Do the learners immediately grasp not only what the question means, but also what kind of an answer is required?

2. Learning value

Does the question stimulate thinking and responses that will contribute to further learning of the target material? Or is it irrelevant, unhelpful or merely time-filling?

3. Interest

Do learners find the question interesting, challenging, and stimulating?

4. Availability

Can most of the members of the class try to answer it? (Note that the mere addition of a few seconds' wait-time before accepting a response can make the question available to a significantly larger number of learners.)

5. Extension

Does the question invite and encourage extended and/or varied answers?

6. Teacher Reaction

Are the learners sure that their responses will be related to with respect, that they will not be put down or ridiculed if they say something inappropriate? (Ur, 1991: 228)

Second, they can use group work techniques to help the learners to optimally get involved in the teaching learning process. "In group work, learners perform a learning task through small-group interaction" which has several advantages: the learners get more opportunities to talk, it fosters their responsibility and independence, it can improve motivation, and it contributes to a feeling of cooperation and warmth in the class (Ur, 1991: 232-233).

Third, they can promote individualization by providing the learners with a self-access centre, or even a full self-access learning programme. In here, the teacher should have a serious attempt to provide for differing learner needs within a class and to place a higher proportion of responsibility for learning on the shoulders of the learners themselves (Ur, 1991: 232-233).

Those are three things that the language teachers can do to foster the language learners' learning success. Griffiths (2008: 263) suggests that teachers "look for methods which best suit the needs of their particular learners in a given situation. They should be ready, flexible and

resourceful to adapt and try a variety of methods in order to help their students achieve success in language learning.

THE ROLE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN THE NEW PARADIGM

There are several roles to be played by foreign language teachers. They are as follow:

First, the teachers who commit to the principle of learner-centredness should address not only the real-life goals and learning preferences of the learners but also their cognitive processing needs (Ranta, 2008: 151). Moir and Nation (2008: 172-173) state that good language learners need autonomy and metacognition if they are to be successful.

Second, foreign language teachers need to instruct task analysis extensively to help learners select "appropriate" strategies for a task and for their learning style, and help them to not just use strategies in a random fashion since Rubin and McCoy (2008: 305) state "less expert learners often do little or no planning before beginning a task".

Third, in order to have learner-centred, strategic classroom which facilitates effective language learning, Nyikos (1996: 110) suggests that teachers need to understand the learning process through learners' eyes, and change their teaching strategies to assist learning strategy development among students

Fourth, the foreign language teachers need to instruct language learning strategies to their students. Oxford (1990:1) suggests the importance of the use of learning strategies for language learning. Kawai (2008: 226) mentions that learners need learning strategies to develop their speaking skills. There are three levels of strategies that they need: strategies to facilitate development of underlying oral skills, better oral communication skills, and the completion of particular speaking tasks. An important role that teachers should have may be to find ways to provide support in order that learners have the motivation to practice and confidence to face interactive opportunities free of the anxiety which might otherwise inhibit their endeavors. Cohen (2007: 31) points out that strategies are conscious mental activity which contain an action, a goal (or an intention) and a learning situation. A mental action might be subconscious, while an action with a goal/intention and related to a learning situation can only be conscious since "appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence."

By instructing the language learning strategies, the teachers can empower the foreign language learners to play their vital roles in their own learning. A salient characteristic of good language learners is active participation and contribution to their own learning (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinay and Robbins, 1999). Nunan (2002: 143) concludes that strategy training,

plus systematic provision of opportunities for learners to reflect on the learning process, did lead to greater sensitivity to the learning process over time.

Besides relying on themselves in instructing the language learning strategies, a variety of learning strategies can be self-instructed through step-by-step print materials given to the individual". In other words, for a self-instruction, the learners need print materials for self-directed strategy instruction (Park and Oxford, 1996: 140). Yang (1996: 210) suggests that in learning strategy instruction, it is important that: (1) the learners' students' beliefs and strategies be discovered, (2) strategies be explained and modeled explicitly, (3) authentic context for strategy use be provided, (4) strategy instruction be made interesting, (5) the learners' be motivated, and (6) strategies-and-beliefs components be implemented in curriculum.

According to Cohen (2007: 38), there are five purposes of language learning strategies: (1) to enhance learning, (2) to perform specified tasks, (3) to solve specific problems, (4) to make learning easier, faster, and more enjoyable, and (5) to compensate a deficit in learning. Oxford and Leaver (1996: 227) state that the purpose of strategy instruction is to help learners become more self-directed, autonomous, and effective students through the improved use language learning strategies. Moreover, according to them, the language learning strategy instruction teaches the language learners how to be better language learners. Dadour and Robbins (1996: 166) conclude learners of English can benefit from strategies designed to improve speaking ability. The learning strategy model of speaking English designed based on the learning strategies applied by competent English speakers is found effective in improving speaking ability (Hendriani: 2012). Griffiths (2008: 89) states higher level students do, indeed, report significantly more frequent use of language learning strategies than do lower level students.

Kaylani (1996: 80) mentions several factors that influence the choice of learning strategy use: gender, self-perceptions of proficiency and motivation, years of foreign language study, and university major. Anderson (2008: 108) states "good language learners develop metacognitive skills which enable them to manage their own learning, thereby rendering less dependent on others or on vicissitudes of the learning situation."

CONCLUSION

Cultural paradigm in foreign language teaching needs to be changed not only in the idea but also in the implementation. Both the foreign language teachers and learners should realize their own roles in reaching learning success. The language teachers, on one hand, should not be the master controller of every learners' learning activity. The learners, on the other hand, must not rely their learning process on their teachers. They can learn without the teachers are

around. The most important one is that the foreign language learners realize that their learning success depends on themselves, not on their teachers. In order that the language learners can take the optimum results of their learning, they need to be helped to identify their own language learning strategies and encouraged to practice and use the strategies appropriately in their foreign language learning.

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