

PROMOTING NATIONALISM IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENT

Rosi Anjarwati
STKIP PGRI Jombang
rosi.stkipjb@gmail.com

Abstract

Primary School in Indonesia is considered to be a basic formal education which has some specific objectives. It is believed that nationalism should be introduced in these ages to build a person with good nationalism character. Anxiety about young generation's national character causes consideration of removing English subject from Primary school curriculum while today's demand of English competency is very high. Many people worry about the influence of western culture that can omit students' national character if it is taught from Primary School level. In fact, the importance of teaching English at early age is clearly needed to create qualified Indonesian human resources in the future. This article aims to propose idea which can give solution to maintain nationalism through teaching English at primary school by giving some alternative models of teaching method and suggested materials.

Key words: Nationalism, Primary School, teaching English

Abstrak

Sekolah Dasar di Indonesia adalah pendidikan dasar formal yang memiliki beberapa tujuan tertentu. Banyak pendapat meyakini bahwa nasionalisme seharusnya diperkenalkan pada masa masa ini untuk membentuk insan berkarakter nasional yang baik. Kekhawatiran terhadap karakter nasional generasi muda menjadi pertimbangan dihapusnya mata pelajaran Bahasa Inggris di kurikulum Sekolah Dasar, disisi lain kebutuhan untuk memiliki kompetensi berbahasa Inggris sangatlah tinggi. Banyak orang khawatir terhadap pengaruh budaya barat yang dapat mengilangkan karakter nasional siswa jika Bahasa Inggris diajarkan mulai tingkat Sekolah Dasar. Kenyataanya, pentingnya pengajaran Bahasa Inggris sejak dini sangat diperlukan untuk menciptakan sumber daya manusia yang berkualitas di masa yang akan datang. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mencetuskan ide yang dapat menjadi solusi mempertahankan nilai nilai nasionalisme melalui pengajaran Bahasa Inggris di Sekolah Dasar dengan memberi beberapa contoh metode pembelajaran alternatif beserta materinya.

Kata Kunci: Nasionalisme, Sekolah Dasar, pengajaran Bahasa Inggris

A. Introduction

Curriculum 2013 or K-13 is the latest School curriculum included English Curriculum which has been released by Indonesian government. The regulation of school curriculum for primary school gives impact to position of English based on the previous curriculum. It refers to the Ministerial Decree of the Department of Education and Culture no. 57/2014 about Curriculum 2013 of Primary School which states that English subject is not included into both general subject of groups A and B. The change happened as the result of a major worry about losing national identity of young generation. This decision receives not only support but also critics from teacher, education expert, child psychologist and society since it has been taught as a local content subject for about two decades. Due to the phenomenon, this paper tries to propose the importance of learning English at primary school, some arguments due to the nationalism and teaching method to sprout up nationalism in English lesson.

Learning English at early age is beneficial to help learners mastering English in the future; early age often called as young language learners. Young language learners are defined as children who are learning a foreign or second language during the first six or seven years of formal education level (McKay, 2006); in Indonesian context, young language learners belong to primary school students. Started from 1994, English has been taught at primary school level as local content subject for the fourth, fifth and sixth grade students (Supriyanti, 2012). Since that time, English becomes popular subject to be mastered as most parents and students think it will help student to gain promising job in the future because majority of good jobs require English mastery. Besides, technology development such as computer and internet use English as instructional language.

The characteristic of young language learners becomes one important consideration to include English as subject

at primary school. As stated by Egan (1979) that students at 4 to 5 through 9 to 10 years old belong to the *Mythic layer* which have some characteristics such as: the students curiosity of how to feel about what they are learning; young children are drawn into a topic and idea through simple polar opposites; children interpret the world in the terms of absolutes, as a fairy tale world operates. Based on those examples of characteristics, it can be assumed that inserting new concept of language will be easier. The above description in line with characteristics of the third cognitive stage defined by Piaget (2000) called *the stage of concrete operation* involving children aged 7 to 11 years. He explained this stage as the development of children's ability to apply logical thought to concrete problems. Using language to exchange information becomes much more important.

B. Discussion

It has been known as hypothesis that children learn second language better than adults; this statement is often used as theoretical framework to support the importance of learning English for young learner as second language or foreign language. The hypothesis which is popular to be *The Critical Period Hypothesis* is the concept which states that children can learn a second language particularly effectively before puberty because their brains are still able to use the mechanisms that assisted first language acquisition (Cameron, 2001). Children at age 6 to 13 are considered as "golden age" in which they are in the peak condition to reach the best achievement. It is supported by research result from Brain Imaging Technology of California University in Los Angeles that children's cognitive process, creativity and divergent thinking are in optimal condition at 6 to 13 years. So, biologically, this period is considered as the exact time to maximize foreign language learning since this period will not be repeated in the future.

Starting learning English as foreign language at young learners offer some advantages. Children who learnt English at early age develop and maintain advantages in the area of English skills, although not all skills; this conclusion is the result of experiences happened in North American in immersion teaching as explained by Cameron (2001). English skill which gets the most advantage is listening comprehension which obtains better overall result for an early beginning; another area which gains benefit is pronunciation. Students' pronunciation can be remembered as long term memory although it is limited to learning language in naturalistic context. Not all area can obtain the best result; in grammar, young children learn second language structure more slowly than older learners since they have to learn to associate or compare it with their first language structure (Harley et al in Cameron 2001). It seems that receptive skills get better outcome from productive skill and grammatical knowledge.

Furthermore, Moon (2005) also mentions the benefits of teaching English to young learners. Firstly, younger is better; this refers to the hypothesis that there is a special period for learning languages during childhood in which if it is missed, it cannot be repeated. It might be trigger a controversy since there is no concrete evidence. Secondly, Younger is better in the long term memory where starting in primary school children increase the amount of time for learning English that enable them to gain better language proficiency than those who start at adulthood. This result can be seen through observation did to children who learn language in natural setting.

Although the theories of young language learner's characteristics provide basic foundation which support the position of English in primary school, there is a worry comes up because of the side effects of teaching English at early age. The first reason might be related to Indonesian demography that enables students having

different mother tongue beside Bahasa Indonesia; some students may learn *Bahasa Indonesia* at their primary school. While they are still learning Bahasa Indonesia's concept, some people argue that learning English at this stage which has different language concept will disturb the process of learning *Bahasa Indonesia*; as the consequence, they are going to be failed in mastering *Bahasa Indonesia* or English and probably in both languages. The second reason appears from English materials with the Western culture are worried to scrape Indonesian culture and identity.

Many young generations seem to lose their national identity; this presupposition appears due to phenomena occur recently which indicates youth's moral degradation. The way they behave, talk, and dressed do not signal Eastern culture as Indonesia professed. Of course it causes a worry of decreasing nationalism value not only for parents and teachers but also our government. Youth of the nation is prepared to be future leader whom need prior attention. The wheel of development of any country lies on the shoulder of how productive and creative the youthful populations are (Odoh & Innocent, 2014). Undoubtedly, youth and nation are complementary each other. The worries perhaps are the main core of consideration taken by government not to include English as the subject in primary school level. In addition, the development of English used in Indonesia shows that children are able to require English although it is not taught at formal school. Parents today often send their children to English course program to supply them with such kind of English knowledge which sometimes gain a better outcome than learning it through formal school because of the intensive program at English course, if it is compared with English subject which only taught once or twice a week as local content subject at primary school.

Nationalism is often defined as individual's identification of their own

nation or love to the nation which could be shown by using official national language, domestic product, appreciating what heroes did in the past and so on. Furthermore, nationalism refers to devotion to one's nation or policy of national independence (Simpson & Weiner, 1991). In Indonesian context, nationalism values were introduced since students are at kindergarten through reciting "Pancasila" and singing national song. Although they have not understood about the meaning of each "sila" or statement, the values of *Pancasila* should be inserted through simple action such as appreciating diversity in term of complexion, religion or tribes. At primary school level, nationalism values are continued to be implanted by introducing heroism and the Indonesia's history.

Personally, I do not think that the existence of English at primary school will decrease student' nationalism. English syllabus for primary school student was designed to develop students' communicative competence both in limited spoken and written form as language accompanying action in school context and having awareness about the nature and the importance of English to increase competitiveness in global society. Based on the purpose of teaching English stated in the syllabus, English material should be prepared appropriately with school context. Although English materials basically adopted the generic structure of English rhetoric, it can be adapted by inserting Indonesia context. For instance, English teacher may insert information about Indonesian moral value when the topic of lesson discusses "*asking for help*" or "*things around us*". Moreover, Indonesian national characters ought to be developed when students of primary school learn at classroom such as how to cooperate, respect others, having courage and responsibility which can be implemented through group works. So, English as local content subject at primary school will not decrease students' nationalism.

Language does not have strong determination of one's nationalism sense although language is considered to be one of nationality symbol. It can be traced from Indonesia's history; Indonesia has been colonized by Dutch for more than three hundred and fifty years; of course it was not a short time. Dutch used their own language to communicate and some of Indonesia people at that time were able to communicate with them; yet, Indonesia people did not lose the sense of their nationalism. They still love their country and willing to sacrifice for their country to gain independence. Another example can be taken from Arabic; as we know that as a country with islam as a majority, Arabic becomes a foreign language that mastered by Indonesia people. Many students in *Pondok Pesantren* learn and master Arabic but they still have sense of nationalism. This can be depicted from the involvement of moslem heroes in creating Indonesia's independence when Dutch and Japan colonized Indonesia.

Learning foreign language gives some advantages for people since there will be possibility for someone to communicate with foreigner nowadays due to technology development. Business and trade require people to connect with other people from all over the world which demand people to understand a different language system from their first language. Furthermore, mastering foreign language, especially English will help people to communicate easier when they travel in abroad as most people in world speak English and use it as one of international language. The requirement of mastering English is also needed for someone who wants to continue his or her study abroad. This condition enable foreign language learner to foster the capability to associate meaning from foreign language and first language and at the same time make learner learn new vocabulary, sentence structure, orthography and phonological system. Thus, learning English is very important for student in Indonesia to be able to compete in international level.

The process of teaching English at primary school in Indonesia should be paid attention due to the different geography and condition of areas in Indonesia. As stated by Supriyanti (2012) that children of the less privileged areas to access qualified teachers, appropriate materials and fun learning is almost impossible to be found. This statement indicates that the availability of qualified English teacher to teach young learner is low; this condition sometimes forces education institution to provide English teacher with inappropriate educational background and qualification to teach English for young learners. As the result, the methods used by those English teachers tend to be boring and burdensome for some students; for example, English teacher only explain English vocabulary by writing down the spelling, translating the meaning into Bahasa Indonesia and ask students to memorize it without providing acceptable and correct pronunciation to utter the vocabulary as model for students. Another example happen when the teacher explains certain structure (tense) without considering the context and asking the students to memorize the pattern. Of course students will be great at memorizing the concept, but they may be do not understand how to communicate with it. As in discussing "simple present tense" most English teachers tend to give the same example in a sentence in the form of "I go to school every day"; this phenomenon shows that the teacher does not understand context since we do not go to school every day, we have holiday on Sunday. The elaborated condition encourages change of teaching method in creating and implementing suitable teaching method for students as young language learner.

Responding the above issues, alternatives teaching method for primary school are needed since students of primary school in Indonesia has different mother tongue and some of them still starting learning Bahasa Indonesia. Before choosing the suitable teaching method to maintain students' nationalism value, there are

several considerations to be taken. Firstly, student's need as young language learner should be analyzed; secondly what skill to be emphasized. Thirdly, choosing nationalism values which are going to be internalized based on the material and finally, deciding the appropriate teaching method. The writer wants to propose and elaborate some teaching methods that might be appropriate to groom nationalism through English teaching.

The first teaching method proposed is Total Physical Response (TPR) in teaching listening. Total Physical Response is developed by James J. Asher in 1977 in which he studied the way very young children acquire language (Linse, 2005). Moreover, she mentions that TPR has some positive aspects such as the use the sense of hearing, sight and touch simultaneously in learning process. By involving these senses, teacher will be easier to direct students in obtaining learning objective since children at this age need to be stimulated by using activities which require concrete involvement. Through Total Physical response, meaning in target language can be obtained through action and learners' memory may be activated when they give respond.

TPR that is going to be elaborated here is using TPR Storytelling. The English teacher can choose the material which contains nationalism values such as Indonesian legend, *Tangkuban Perahu*. Teacher should use interesting media to catch students' interest for instance by using finger puppets which describes the character of the story. Since this activity will be done without audio tools, teacher must prepare himself or herself well in the form of story content mastery, expression and the most important thing is appropriate pronunciation. As we know that teacher played a role model here and young learners are in the stage of developing phonological awareness that will determine their success in reading and writing.

By using this method, teacher can introduce difficult vocabulary items before telling the story. After that, teacher tells story by manipulating the puppet. Having the first time storytelling, teacher may ask students to be a volunteer to hold and move or act the puppet as teacher tells story in the second time. Finishing the storytelling activity, teacher may stimulate students by giving several questions related to the story and continue to guide students analyzing moral value from the story. This activity can reduce student's stress in learning and understanding story from different language which is usually got from reading activity. Moreover, TPR will make students easier in understanding vocabularies through observation and action without memorizing or drilling.

Another TPR activity is by using songs. Teacher can choose a song with nationalism sense to teach English. Whenever doing TPR activity for primary school, it is important to consider the language and vocabulary to be used. Make sure that the vocabularies are not too difficult for them to understand. Moreover, the sentence structure should be simple. Teacher may translate Indonesian nationalism song into English and ask students to sing along with; before this activity, teacher should do modeling by pronouncing the words or lyric appropriately. After that, teacher can write new vocabularies both in English and Bahasa Indonesia and direct students to match the appropriate vocabularies; this activity can be done by inviting some students to be volunteers. Students can observe their friends' action and learn how to be brave in giving opinion. This activity will enhance both vocabulary mastery and phonology in joyful learning atmosphere.

The second alternative teaching method is teaching by using games. Games has been known as interesting activity which loved by young learner. Inserting games in teaching learning process is hoped to increase students' motivation in learning.

There are many advantages of using games in the classroom as stated by Lee (1995), for instance games can eliminate boredom in daily classroom activity; it also encourages students to be involved in classroom activity that give them something needing great mental or physically effort. In addition, games can be implemented to teach various language skills that provide students enjoyable learning situation and increase interaction among students. Children at primary school level will absolutely like playing games; it helps them to be involved actively and happily in classroom activities.

An example of games that can be used to promote nationalism is Talking and Writing box. The talking and writing box is made of pictures that children have self-selected and are interesting to them (Linse, 2005). In applying this teaching method, teacher can provide a topic about Indonesian heroes as at primary school level student have learnt it through social subjects. The procedure is started by putting some pictures of Indonesian national heroes in the box, and then teacher divides the class into several groups consist of three students. A student from each group is asked to pick a picture from the box and discuss the picture with his or her own group. Given several minutes, students write what they know about the hero in the picture. Next, they express what they have discussed in turns. Besides enhancing students' motivation, this game also teaches students to cooperate with other and appreciate others.

Indonesian traditional games can also be used to promote nationalism sense in teaching English to primary school student. English teacher can modify traditional games called *Petak Umpet* (Hide and Seek) to be applied in the classroom. At the beginning, teacher needs to decide the material used such as fruits, animals or professions; each student should draw and write one fruit in a piece of paper. And then teacher can divide the class into several groups consist of 4 to 5 students, one of them will be the guide while the rest

students should hide their paper. If the guide can find the paper, he or she has to give clues about the word to another group while other students can propose “yes/no” question related to the word. Student who can guess the word correctly is going to get point to decide which group wins. This activity will train students both in speaking and listening through student-student interaction and teach them how to corporate and appreciate other’s opinion.

Ular Naga (Dragon) game is another example of traditional games which can be used in teaching English to primary school. In this game, two students should hold their hands to make a gate and the rest of students have to stand in line like a snake. While singing a song, students need to walk around through the gate; when the song is finished, student who is trapped in the gate must answer the questions from teacher about topic of the day. Students who can answer it correctly will stand behind one of student who pretends to be the gate and those who cannot answer it correctly must stand behind another student of the gate. It is a fun and exciting game to promote student’ independence and confidence; and at the same time preserving traditional value of the nation by introduce it to young generation. By knowing traditional games, students will realize how rich is their country Indonesia and hopefully it also increases their pride to be Indonesian people.

The next teaching method which can be applied to teach English in primary school is by using cooperative learning method. Cooperative learning has five basic elements (Johnson, johnson, 1994; Holt, 1993 in Fahrurrazy, 2011). First, there should perceive the principle of “sink or swim together” if one fails, all fail. Therefore, all group members work for the benefit of him/ herself and also for the group. Second, both individual and group importance should be considered. It means that the member ought not to be selfish and account on other member without doing anything. Third, there is a face to face

interaction to promote the shared success. They should help, support, encourage, and praise each other’s learning efforts. Fourth, interpersonal and soft skills should appear in which students do not only learn the subject matters but also some characters such as leadership, how to make decision and minimize the conflict among members . Fifth, there is group processing. Teacher need to give time for the groups to discuss and make final decision.

Cooperative learning provides several advantages such as learners are able to be involved actively in teaching learning process as students become the center of learning. The next advantage is each member can discuss and share what is in his or her mind about the discussion topic to gain better understanding. Moreover, cooperative learning enables students to motivate each other to contribute in making decision in the same amount chance (Faryadi, 2007). Those advantages may be achieved if the concept of cooperative learning if teacher can manage and ensure the application runs as it should be.

Cooperative learning method’s elements are beneficial in implanted nationalism because through this method students are introduced to work as team in which unity is needed and diversity should be appreciated. Students are hoped to internalize these nationalism value into their real life. Cooperative learning method has various teaching strategy; Kagan (1998) described cooperative learning strategy such as Blind Sequencing, Snowball Throwing, Jigsaw, Numbered Head Together, Stir the Class, Telephone, etc. Those types of cooperative learning method involve the elements of cooperative learning which can help teacher promotes nationalism with each different characteristic. By cooperating with their friends, young learners will learn to maintain unity, respect diversity in the form of appreciating others’ opinion in discussion, different intelligence, and to be proud of their team. These values are the analogies of our country as a nation which

has diversity in religion, tribes, region language and demography.

Not all cooperative learning method is appropriate to be conducted in primary school due to the various steps. A simple example is Numbered Head Together in which students work in a team or group consist of 4 or 5 students. Each student will be given a card with different number, and then teacher gives questions to be discussed. The questions should be adjusted based on students' level and is not burden the students. Each group has to discuss and ensure that every member understand the answer; finally, teacher will call a number randomly and the student with the number called must answer the question individually. Through this type of cooperative learning, students will learn how to achieve democratic value as a characteristic of Indonesia by discussing with their friends.

C. Conclusion

To sum up, learning English at early age is beneficial to contribute learner's success in mastering English in the future. The position of English in Primary school as local content subject will not decrease student's nationalism sense as long as the teacher provide teaching and learning atmosphere that facilitate learners in acquiring nationalism and insert nation character. Furthermore, suitable teaching method in English is needed to promote nationalism such as by using TPR storytelling, games and cooperative learning method and internalization of nationalism value through appropriate materials.

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