CHALLENGES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

Tina Mariany Kariman
Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni
Universitas Negeri Medan

ABSTRACT

The accelerating globalization and the high mobility of innovation and communication have brought about many consequences in education especially in English language. English as a widely spoken language in a global setting should be taught and learnt accordingly (including its culture) so that the outputs as a result of the teaching-learning process can compete and fulfill one of the major requirements in the work market, i.e. fluency in spoken and written English. It is prime time that the education sector should be aware of the availability of the many varieties of teaching materials and Information and Communication Technologies that need to be introduced and implemented wisely so as to cater for the learners' needs. The development of professionalism in various aspects should be conducted in line with the changes occur elsewhere.

INTRODUCTION

The international context of globalization and the technological development bring some inevitable imperatives. One of them is the great widespread and heightened need for learning English as the most essential international language for doing international communication and business. The importance of English as an international language is widely acknowledged (Naisbitt and Aburdene, 1990) and it continuously increases as more and more people are wanting or being required to learn and master English for different purposes (Richards, 1985). Its practical uses range from technological communications, such as computers and International Network (Internet) to managing human resources of different language and cultural backgrounds. Business cannot wait, and there are insufficient employees with sufficiently good English to fill jobs that require little more than rudimentary English language proficiency. Employees in department stores, shops, customer services, and even hawkers in big cities like Jakarta find themselves learning broken English by

119

trial and error out of necessity. This is not to stress the shortage of English language proficient employees in the increasing number of multinational corporations established in the Asian regions. One can imagine the required number of employees in this globalization era with excellent English speaking ability. In addition, the 21st century with its higher degree of globalization, high information and communication technologies (ICT) has shown a higher degree of needs to have employees who are computer literate and Internet literate. The global lifestyles emerge due to the influence of business, travel, and television.

In this millennium, the social context is globalization. The years 2003 known as the ASEAN FREE TRADE AREA (AFTA) and 2020 known as the ASIA PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION (APEC) demand highly qualified and creative individuals to compete in every walk of life. The needs of mastering English is strongly felt, especially as a common medium of communication due to the rapid growth of businesses and increased occupational mobilities.

There is a growing evidence that the success in language learning (and in other subjects) is related to learner having an active and independent involvement with language learning. Autonomous learners or not necessarily, or even characteristically isolated or independent learners, may well be found in conventional classrooms, but they can be distinguished from teacher dependent learners in terms of several characteristics.

This paper is an attempt to provide an insight into some of the challenges in English language education in Indonesia including the development of the teachers proficiency in the teaching – learning process, the students' needs, and the availability of facilities that greatly support the quality of the outputs, and to document innovation that has taken place in education.

INNOVATION IN EDUCATION

To "innovate" means to bring in something new; make changes in anything established, and to bring in (something new) for the first time (The Macquarie Dictionary, 1988:901). For some, the word "innovate" conjures up pictures of something fine and good, of a brave new world in which the inconsistencies, inequalities and inefficiencies of the past are swept away. Yet, innovation also has a cost. The restructuring of education and the retraining of educators should be made in order that it could operate within a free market framework. The free market idea is that demand should determine supply, that good schools and colleges, like good traders, will stay in businesses and inefficient schools and colleges, like inefficient traders will go out of businesses.

Innovation in education is basically changes in education. It covers the perspective at the micro and macro levels; the different levels include classroom level, school level, university level, national level, and international level. The various components of the education system in which innovation occurs are namely the: (1) objectives, (2) curriculum and teaching tasks, (3) updated

facilities, and (4) evaluation system. Any changes at one part of the components will effect in other parts. No innovation in education can be sustained by changing only one component of the system. Differences in teaching methods, in teaching the curriculum affect the meaning of "innovation" too. Various theorists in education have different ideas about curriculum and teaching methods and innovation, but in practice no one and no one model is applicable to all because each model only tackles a certain aspect of learning; it doesn't tell every other kind of learning and different models can be integrated in the strategies of teaching.

There are many ways of teaching, but the three major ones might include (1) coaching (where some form of skill is involved.), (2) socratic or interactive (where there is question and answer), and (3) presenting. Teachers can change their perception about their students in the class as various different groups, for example peer group, task group, playgroup, and family. Some variables affecting teacher's behavior include (1) availability of textbooks, (2) pupil's background, (3) content of teaching, (4) objectives of teaching, (5) the evaluation procedure and (6) teacher's own belief about teaching and learning (Tomalin and Stempelski: 1989).

ENGLISH AS A TRULY INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

The paradigm of education has changed with the presence of ICT. The view of English as being useful as a window to the international world or as a tool, a convenient tongue for international communication, has been well accepted among language authorities. The English language is expanding and developing its reach in a dramatic fashion. Using the channels of international business and the open accessibility of gaining knowledge from the multimedia and virtual world, the language is breaking free and becoming a genuine world language.

At present and the future, many contend that English is an international language (Graddol, 1997). It is not because it is most widely spoken nature language in the world since by most estimates Mandarin has three times as many nature speakers as English, but rather because of the growing number of speakers who are acquiring some familiarity with English as their second or third language. This widespread usage leads to the general regard of English as a useful tool and less and less concern about the different accents. However, it is necessary that foreign language instruction should be made more relevant to the aspirations of the students.

The Cultural Issue in Learning English

Language teacher education can never be rigid and perspective as the demands of the modern world are changing fast, particularly as they are mostly unpredictable. In addition, it is also culture-bound, so it is difficult to "prescribe" principles, which would be applicable universally. It is commonly accepted that language is a part of culture and it plays a very important role in it. Language

simultaneously reflects culture, and is influenced and shaped by it. Brown (1994: 165) describes the two as follows: "A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture. Some people say that language is the mirror of culture where people can see a culture through its language. Every language form being used has meanings, carries meanings that are not in the same sense because it is associated with culture. People of different cultures can refer to different things while using the same language forms, for example, the word "dog" in English and "gou" in Chinese refer to the same kind of animal, but most English people associate *dog* with "a good friend" while Chinese with "watchdogs". So, cross cultural understanding will be an important subject to be taught in order to appreciate one's culture and one's language.

EFFECTIVENESS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

One simple challenging question is to what extent has English language teaching in each country (specifically in Indonesia) been performed effectively and sufficiently. In other words, how good is the quality of the product the education system has produced? The problem lingers around two aspects, namely the quantity and the quality. The need for learning English is evident. One clear indicator is the high number of sales of self-instruction English language learning media (or the multimedia (Kariman, 2002)). Logically, when there is a great demand and insufficient and inadequate supply, it follows that people will find their own ways to learn English as effectively and as fast as possible. The most popular and effective solutions at present are taking short practical language training courses and learn English from owned tapes and videos, etc. This phenomenon posits a very pertinent question for English language educators, i.e. the question of their product quality, which further stirs, a series of questions regarding their consign of learners' needs, the relevance and effectiveness of teaching materials, and the appropriate teaching methods and process, including teachers' attitudes and values in teaching English.

In this on-going technological development, the education sector should always try to cope up with the introduction of the many varieties of teaching materials (Widdowson, 1990) and ICT gadgets. The term ICT covers amongst other things the use of (1) hardware, (2) software, and (3) network. Foreign language learners get a stimulus to acquire a foreign language more willingly when it is presented in a lively manner. The learning revolution has taken place (Dryden and Vos, 1999). Authentic teaching materials are everywhere. To name a few: (1) English language newspapers are available to students around the world. They are a rich source of information and also a rich source for language learning –the language of ads is authentic and up-to-date (Lutcavage, 1992); (2) The practical aspects of using video is a language classroom (Herron, Henley, and Cole, 1995) indicate that the visual support in the form of descriptive pictures significantly improved scores with language videos for English speaking students. At the most basic level of instruction, video is a form of

communication which can be achieved without the help of language since the interaction is shown by gestures, eye contact, and facial expression to convey a message. Videos allow the learner to see the body rhythm and speech rhythm in second language discourse through the use of authentic language and speed of speech. It can help utilize technology to facilitate language learning (Arthur, 1999); (3) The ICT gadgets (including Television, mobile phones, and internet) are potential sources for language teaching. The availability of the many programs on TV presented in English, provide a wide range of selections to be implemented in classroom settings. The advancement of mobile phones has to some extent, become a new source of teaching-learning process in schools. This has brought about teachers' perception on how students learn English through the "English Version" of Short Messaging Service (SMS) and Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) (Syril, 2003). The Electronic Learning (E-Learning) in education has given a much wider source of information to students as well as teachers (Kariman, 2005). E-mail, a form of a synchronous computer mediated communication has been called "the mother of all Internet applications". Since the evolution of network, computers can offer language, learners more than drills; they can be a medium of real communication in the target language, including composing and exchanging messages with other students in the classroom or around the world.

The introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC, (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2004)) is one of the many breakthroughs to uplift the standard performance of the students. Its implementation brings about some consequences. On the one hand, it should be implemented but on the other hand, four major problems still remain unsolved, namely (1) teacher-student ratio, (2) teachers' competencies in subject matters taught, (3) limited facilities, and (4) low participation of stakeholders.

WHAT DO LEARNERS NEED?

People learn to adapt to change but another aspect of the paradox of social living is that learning also helps people evoke change. The process of learning is the process of bringing about change. After the process of learning, a learner expects a change in life. In connection with learning English, learners need to be able to communicate in English for very practical everyday use, socially and particularly at work. Little (1990) asserts that if language learners are to be efficient communicators in their target language, they must be autonomous to the extent of having sufficient independence, self-reliance, and self-confidence to fulfill the variety of social, psychological and discourse roles in which they will cast. This of course, will require the teaching contents to be practical and relevant for the learners (Kariman, 1988).

Very often language teachers just focus on the language itself per se, content with whatever exercises are made available in the text developed mostly in the western cultural context. However the guidelines of the CBC have at least minimized the problems in terms of Contextual Language Teaching (CLT).

123

xzas

The new generation of ICT and E-Learning will rapidly turn out to be a source of learning in this 21st century (Kariman, 2005). The gap between the language teacher and the learners is going to be even greater. Internet access through computer laboratory is not uniform (in developed, developing, and within developed nations (Murray, 1999).

Thus, the context of learners' needs demands a call for a more holistic approach to English language teaching that is responsive to learners' needs and appropriate to local reality. The appropriate teaching methods and process is left to the teachers' expertise in devising the appropriate ones once the learners' goal is correctly focused.

THE 21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS

Education is multifunction (Biggs and Tefler, 1987: 5). It means that it can function as an enrichment, socialization, and development of individual and group for preparation in facing the challenges in the work force. The social context of education consists of many aspects such as ideology, culture, and social situation (Martin, 1992 and Halliday and Martin, 1993). To restructure schools for the twenty-first century, teacher leadership is essential. A teacher is a human element in determining the success of education (Alder, 1982) and the excellent teacher is a source that is very critical in every teaching-learning activity (Shapera, 1985) whereas a modern school is a complex institution (Houston, Clift, Freiberg, and Warner, 1988). The curriculum should be covered and the environment should be made flexible in order to allow teachers to serve the students' needs. The three major themes of school reform (Darling-Hammond, 1994) are: (1) creating learner-centered schools that focus on learners' needs rather than standardized procedures, (2) teacher professionalism is important for the creation of knowledge-based schools organized to build on what is known about teaching, learning, curriculum, and human resources development, (3) creating schools that can be genuinely accountable to and for students.

Creating learning-centered and learner-centered schools require changing the nature of school reform efforts. Rather than trying to make the bureaucratic system work harder by enacting more mandates, focus should be made on learners and map backwards from learners' needs to structures that will allow meaningful, well supported learning. This includes the rearranging schedules to allow more time for in-depth and cross-disciplinary learning, for more challenging forms of hands-on work, and for greater opportunities for team teaching and team planning. This is a shift to the approach to school reform, that is, from pursuing top-down standardized solutions to acknowledging the need for local ideas and flexibility. Consequently, teaching has to be a complex, interactive, reciprocal process. This presents that teachers are the true concept professionals (Shapero, 1985).

It is realized that the restructuring of schools, is at a crossroad. There are a lot of battles to be fought. But a vision on leadership from the teaching profession is possible. In the future, teaching continues to become a profession

124

that is student-centered and knowledge-based. In the coming years, the public education system can look something like this.

NEW DIRECTIONS OF GLOBAL EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE GENERATION

Globalization has been defined by Giddens (1990: 64) as the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. Education for the future generation should be something that can be contributed to the construction of cooperative human society where all the people of the world work together to pursue the co-prosperity and the common happiness of mankind. The global education should start from the education of international understanding. Ethnocentrism in the education of international understanding should be avoided because it may be the essential yardstick of value judgment. Children should be taught the fact that if one's culture and country is important, then other culture and other country are important as well. The global education should have its basis on the concept of mutual respect. If interdependent relationship in this international society should be kept, it is very important to understand and respect other countries, other cultures and other ethnic groups.

The contents of global education includes (1) providing certain learning experiences of understanding the world as a whole and single community, (2) letting our children to acquire the skills and attitudes of learning through their daily lives in and out of school, (3) prohibition of nurturing egocentric or exclusive way of thinking which may be resulted from the education preponderant to one's own country, and (4) the interdependencies among countries all over the world searching alternative ways for the resolution of problems occurring in various parts of the region.

The 21st century is also known as the century of knowledge development and a general phenomenon of sharing culture and education among countries and regions will be prevailing. The trends of internationalization and globalization are inevitable. Accordingly, the education toward the globalization should not be limited to those bases on one region or one station. It needs to be based on a general and synthetic approach including broader region and/or the whole world.

The transfer of educational technology, especially ICT in educational institutions should be carefully implemented and for sure, technology can accelerate English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to develop language skills (Ybara, 2003). Educational Information Technology (ELT) has not been used consistently and pervasively in schools. New technology is going to develop faster and faster. Today's new technology will be tomorrow's old hat. When new technology tools are used, classroom practice remains fundamentally unchanged. However, extensive research in the field indicates that educational technology is endowed with a potential to innovate education.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

There are numerous challenges in the English language education especially in Indonesia because of the globalization era and the rapid development of science and technology, including ICT. ICT is an essential tool. So, basing English lessons around some of its underlying principles will be appropriate and may engage students in the same way that a lesson based on the language of a pop song can motivate reluctant learners. The value of the Internet for language teaching is undeniable. It is a source of authentic material, a place for publication of material produced in the classroom and a tool for intercultural communication. All these should be supported with the effective and efficient reformation of the education system; in this respect to update the teaching-learning process and the availability of the facilities to cater for the needs of qualified human resources in the market place. To fulfill the students' needs, teachers' professionalism should be improved because their needs should be the target for the required qualified outputs and in return be ready for the preparation of a much brighter generation. Some, if not, a complete change in the education system is urgent. The future generation will be the generation of hard work with many global challenges.

REFERENCES

Adler, J.M. (1982). *The Paideia proposal: An educational manifesto.* New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

Arthur, P (1999). *Why use video?. A teachers perspective.* USELT 2, 4,4.

Biggs, J. B. and Tefler, R. (1987). *The process of learning.* Sydney: Prentice Hall of Australia.

Block, D. and Cameron, D. (Eds). (2002). *Globalization and language teaching.* London: Routledge.

Darling – Hammond L. (1994). *Will 21st century schools really be different?* The Education Digest. 60, 1, 4-8.

Departemen Pendidikan Nasional (2004). *Kurikulum berbasis kompetensi.* Jakarta: Depdiknas.

Giddens, A. (1990). *The Consequences of modernity.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Graddol, D. (1997). *The future of English.* London: The British Council.

Houston, W.R., Clift, R.T., Freiberg, H.S. and Warner, A.R. (1988). *Touch 'the future.' Teach!* New York: West Publishing Company.

Heron, C., Hanley, J. and Cole, S. (1995). *A comparison study of two advance organizers introducing foreign language students to video.* Modern Langauge Journal, 79, 3, 387 –394.

Kariman, T. M. (1982). *Students attitudes toward the English by Television*

proagramme on TVRI Medan North Sumatera. A Case Study on Grade
II Junior Secondary School. Report of a Postgraduate Project completed
as a minor requirement for the degree of Master of Arts. Macquarie
Univesity, Sydney, Australia.

------------------. (1988). *Learning styles and academic performances in An Open
University. An Indonesian Study.* Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation.
Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.

------------------. (1992). *Penerapan teknologi untuk meningkatkan kualitas dan
akses pendidikan.* Pidato pengukuhan diucapkan pada pengukuhan
jabatan Guru Besar Tetap dalam Ilmu Pendidikan pada Fakultas Bahasa
dan Seni IKIP Medan dihadapan Sidang Senat IKIP Medan. Medan, 13
November.

------------------. (2002). *Strategi pembelajaran abad XXI.* Makalah disampaikan
pada Seminar Nasional Teknologi Pembelajaran. Jakarta 18-19 Juli.

------------------. (2005). *E-learning in education,* in Anthology: Berbagi Kasih
Tumbuh Bersama (Eds). Medan: Penerbit Unimed.

Lutcavage, C. (1992). *Authentic Video in Intermediate German.* Die Unterrichts-
praxis 251, 33-40.

Martin, J.R. (1992). *English text: System and Structure.* Amsterdam: John
Benjamin.

Halliday, M.A.K. and Martin, J.R. (1993). Writing science: Literacy and
discursive power. London: Palmer Press.

Murray, D.E. (1999). *Accesses to Information Technology: Consideration for
language educators.* Prospect: a Journal of Australian TESOL, 14, 3, 4-
12.

Naisbitt, J. and Aburdene, P. (1990). *The new directions for the 1990's.*
Megatrends 2000. New York: Warren Books Inc.

Richards, J.C. (1985). *The context of language learning.* Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press.

Syril, Z. (2003). *Sarana barup pembelajaran di sekolah.* Kompas, 22 Desember.

Shapero, A. (1985). *Managing professional people: Understand creative
performance.* New York: The Face Press.

The Macquarie Dictionary (1998). *The National Dictionary* (2nd. Revision).
Australia: The Book Printer.

Tomalin, B. and Stempelski, S. (1989) *Video in action.* New York: Prentice Hall.

Widdowson, H.G. (1990). *Aspects of language teaching.* Oxford: University
Press.

Ybara, R (2003). *Using technology to help ESL/EFL students develop language
skills.* The Internet TESL Journal 9, 3, 12 –14.