

HOLISTIC APPROACH IN ELT: LIFE EDUCATION THROUGH ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract

As the integral part of education, English language teaching has taken too little part of it and brought it to the level where English learning seems to talk only about English. In another extent, English for specific purpose declares its specialty to satisfy the demand of workforce. Researches in ELT are also commonly propelled by the urges to counter the work challenges and to answer the questions of how English can effectively be acquired. Reductionism roots as the problem. This tendency is then strengthened by the education system that leaves the teachers with not many options, systematically forcing the language learners to merely surpass the minimum standard score of English language subject. Within ecological and humanity crises, ELT needs to contribute more than just enabling the learners to communicate well or preparing them for works. ELT needs to take broader scope in order to induce life enlightenment, educate life skills, nurture humanity, and maintain the planet. Such enormous scope cannot be maintained by the current reductionistic approach. Therefore, holistic approach in ELT that integrates it with the whole network of life appears as the solution for this problem.

Keywords: holistic approach, life education, English teaching

1. INTRODUCTION

Education, seen from the opposing perspective, has been so long regarding itself as product-oriented manifestation of resources and actions. It works under the perspective that human's experience can be isolated into fragments embodying certain ideological imperatives such as *behaviorism*, *cognitivism*, etc. Its attempts to manipulate learning experience reflected from the particular, ideological, pedagogical decision, isolated learning environment (classrooms), the choice of learning materials, and assessment are the crystallization of materialistic, mechanistic, objectivistic, and atomistic educational worldviews. That is what Miller (2000) calls as *reductionism* in education. The whole human possible competences are partly respected. The competence to structurally, logically, and rationally think and solve problems are assumed better than the competences to love, to manage emotions, and to be faithful to the God. It is so because education only cultivates the parts of human being which effectively and efficiently fit the demands of international competition and consumption. This objectification of human experience has led education into confinement, disabling it to connect with the complexity of life network. As the result, the reductionistic purpose of education does not only rule out the fact that human is a complete intellectual, psychological, emotional, aesthetic, creative, social, and spiritual body but it also fails to address global ecological crisis caused by the lack of understanding of human's place within the cosmos (Capra, 1996). Hence, holistic education is not a strategy or technique but rather a paradigm challenging the atomistic, mechanistic educational foundation which is applied today.

English language teaching (ELT) as the integral part of education cannot escape reductionism effect. The era of method is an undeniable evidence of it. The

competition among experts promoting methods challenging one another in order to know which one was the best (Richard & Rodgers, 2001) appeared to be phenomena of battle among reductionistic ELT's pedagogical products. Consequently, ELT was isolated from the outside real world since it concerned too much on how to control the learning environment. It was until the paradigm of postmethod proposes new perspective to see methods which are regarded as optional combinable ways to treat students (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Kumaravadivelu (2008) argues that language teaching should take socio-political context or environment as serious consideration through the perimeter of *possibility*. Thus, the students can actualize what they learn from the classroom language learning in their real life, making it more meaningful. In the heart of postmethod era, it is the realization that both teachers and students need to empower themselves, be autonomous, and be morally responsible for their own decision in order to transform into better society. The spirit of postmethod pedagogy requires the agents to critically assess the context of learning to determine the aims of classroom language learning. In the other words, ELT should address the environmental, social, or political issues that become crucial concern in the context. The extent to which, ELT takes the global scale crisis such as global warming, war and terrorism, climate change, etc. into account. Postmethod pedagogy and holistic education have one important thing in common. Both of them demand comprehensive understanding of human and context since they need to understand the right and wrong to well function. It can also be concluded that postmethod pedagogy is a pedagogical belief that makes holistic education possible to take place within atomistic educational design.

Indonesia currently implements curriculum 2013. It integrates the unity of 3 personal aspects. They are the knowledge, skills, and attitude (permendikbud no. 20, 2016). Broadly speaking, this curriculum reveals that there are more than cognitive aspects which are essential to be assessed. Attitude is formed and influenced by belief, affect, and behavior (Albarracin et al., 2005), each of which is a complex matter requiring comprehensive understanding of human being. Its attempt to change the students' attitudes along with their knowledge and skills has led the teachers to include holistic approach in the teaching instruction. Thus, this research is also in search of holistic model of English language instruction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 English Language Teaching and Learning

English language teaching has been going through multiple times of paradigm shift, starting from the pre-method era to the post-method era which is not showing a sign that this flowing pattern will stop. Along with the progress of each paradigm, schools, teachers, students, methods, trend of researches and so forth experiences radical change of how they are viewed. It occurs as the respond to the intellectual dissatisfaction that leads to the groundbreaking breakthrough, giving birth to the new faculty of thought. In consecutive fashion, there has been a considerable increase of the number of aspects that become the important concerns in English language teaching and learning.

Haycraft (1978) pointed out at least four basic principles in ELT: the students, the language, the course content, and the teaching sequence. Two decades later, Harmer (2001) had prescribed the more complex composition of ELT which encompasses the world of English as the language and its position in the learning context, learners and teachers, theories, methods and techniques, class management,

learning focus, language skills, design and planning, and evaluation. Brown (2007) described English language teaching and learning in the more meticulous fashion, involving the advanced second language acquisition theories and the influence of sociocultural factors. The acknowledgement of SLA inquiry has been started in the near end of 19th century. Brown (1980) even began to include the inquiry field of the SLA since his first book edition of *ELT and learning's principles*. After witnessing how English language teaching and learning develop, it can be known that everything will be more complicated later in the future as the more knowledge are known, there will also be better awareness to see more things that have not yet be known. Every English teacher should be aware of this development since the radical turn of ELT direction and concern episodes may change in unpredictable time.

The era of constructivism and connectionism motivate intellectuals not only to develop what has been established but also to question the very basic and fundamental core of the authorized knowledge. The success of proving the falsification of the old believed truth such as learning styles (Pashler, 2008) or the emergence of a new finding like what have ever happened to behaviorists who encounter the birth of cognitive theory may change all the things that are built upon it. Hence, a careful move to anticipate the possible change due to the unknown established or undiscovered knowledge needs to be taken as an effort to avoid the irrational belief on the false truth.

After the dawn of postmethod pedagogy, Kumaravadivelu (2003a) proposed the three perimeters of it. They are particularity, practicality, and possibility. Postmethod pedagogy changes the way language teachers should see themselves, the learners, the language teaching and learning, and the methods.

a. The perimeter of particularity

Particularity deals with the particular world in where the language learning takes place that shapes a certain urgency and characteristic of the learners. Any language pedagogy is required to be adjusted to support those particular needs. Particularity is not the prerequisite but is the process and the goal. Kumaravadivelu (2003b) posited that the perimeter of particularity is essentially in line with the hermeneutic perspective of *situational understanding* which is the meaningfulness of the pedagogy would be impossible to be composed unless the holistic interpretation of the particular situation had been comprehended. The overall appropriate consideration and follow up will build meaningful learning up because it amplifies the lived experiences.

b. The perimeter of practicality

Kumaravadivelu (2003b) explained practicality as the area of synchronization between theory and practice which struggles in the self of teacher. The process toward ideal practicality is the process of calibrating what the teachers know with his practice. The manufactured theories or methods are formed from the idealized context which is many times not relevant to the random condition of the fields in real practice. The knowledge appears to contradict the reality from the teachers' point of view. Hence, the teachers need to carefully examine the applied theories in order to seek for the unmanageable variables in that particular context which are not fulfilling the prerequisites and look for the solution to make the theories apply as they are. In the other way of speaking, the teachers must be sensitive to themselves, monitoring the strength and weakness of selves to figure out what is lack and what to look for. Teachers are also expected to be sensitive to the network

of the applied theories by tracking down the cause and effect as well as their relationship with numbers of multidisciplinary field of knowledge.

At the end, those who have reached the ideal of practicality will develop an intuition to totally comprehend their field of action. In the other words, there is a total connection between the teacher with the context of teaching learning. What works and what does not work can be easily identified, information is easily assessed, and the solution of it becomes easy to execute due to the possession of the high sensitivity which is shaped by the embodiment of theory network within self. When the mind and action has been aligned or when there is action in thought and thought in action, the *theory of practice* has been realized (Manen, 1991 in Kumaravadivelu, 2009).

c. The perimeter of possibility

This perimeter is highly influenced by the critical pedagogy which is spearheaded by a Brazilian education activist's philosophy, Paulo Freire (Kumaravadivelu, 2009). They set up education as the instrument of empowering people to fight for the justice. However, it tries to sound the fact that language learning in the classroom cannot be disconnected from the life especially in terms of sociocultural urgency. Education cannot be isolated from the sociopolitical power that works in the society. Humans that act as the teachers, principal, and the students are all from the society. They bring their non-school problems in the classroom, affecting the effectiveness of the teaching learning process, so the educators may not ignore these crucial factors.

This research is also contextualized to the time when it is conducted. Postmethod pedagogy will be the outer framework that defines the elements of English language teaching and learning such as the learners, teachers, design, and planning as well as places its purpose. In short, the English language teaching and learning in this research will be understood as an effort to empower the students, enabling them to solve sociocultural and political problem, through meaningful English learning conducted by the professional teachers.

a. Learners

The insight of the language learners has been the major influence on how English teaching and learning should be conducted. The faculty of second language acquisition which is the collection of multitude research findings from multidisciplinary fields of inquiry helps to visualize the principal variables of learners that affect their second language mastery. Ortega (2009) introduced at least 9 domains of investigation in SLA that could significantly influence the learners' ability of acquiring new language and determine the individual differences which consequently demand each learner to be treated differently. They are the domain of age, crosslinguistic influences, linguistic environment, cognition, the development of learner language, aptitude, motivation, affect, and the social dimension. The argument is that the individual differences built up from the interaction between individual with the external forces determine a particular way of a learner to effectively learn new language. It is the challenge for every teacher to facilitate the difference.

Harmer (2001) classified learners based on the range of age into three categories, young children, adolescent, and adult. Each category of the learners is characterized with different traits and attributes. Young children is recognized as having limited attention span, while adolescent is marked with its time period of searching for identity, and adult learners who are more aware and conscious about

the motives of their language learning. He argued that the age of the learners becomes the major factor in taking pedagogical decision.

b. Teachers

Britzman (1994) made an advantageous differentiation between the *role* of teachers and the *identity* of teachers. The role of teachers is the official obligation which is assigned to them for playing teaching position while the identity deals with the belief and individual commitment reflected on the character and way of conduct as an educator. The identity is characterized by the presence of dedication and totality of effort to teach.

The recognition towards teacher roles has experienced major changes. Through historical timeline, teachers have shifted on the way they are acknowledged: as passive technician, as reflective practitioners, and as transformative intellectuals (Kumaravadivelu, 2003b). Each of them holds historical background that determines the rules of conducts.

The passive technician was labeled to the teachers back then in the era when any pedagogical properties should be validated and empirically verified before it could be applied. Behaviorism that took the throne of thought did not allow teachers and teaching method to take place since they were assumed as having too many empirically unobservable variables. The passive technicians played based on transmission approach, transmitting the knowledge to the students like a conduit. Dewey (1933) has influenced the way teachers should act in classroom which was no longer to be a conduit that transferred knowledge but as a problem solver. Teachers have a great chance to do reflection on-action and in-action. It will allow them to comprehend the complexity of teaching learning theories-practice-process patterns which are removed from the experts' world. Teachers as transformative Intellectuals derive its recognition after reflecting on the work of critical pedagogist (Kumaravadivelu, 2003b). Teachers as the transformative intellectuals are aware of socio-political issues. According to Giroux and McLaren (1989), teachers should manage a way of connecting the pedagogical theory and practice to solve social problems and empower students, keeping the equilibrium of equality in the society. They were the agents of social reform.

The postmethod teachers are independent and autonomous. They self-initiate reflective actions to evaluate their own conducts and create better situation (Wallace, 1991). In order to develop their teaching skill and to improve learning, teachers are required to perform an action research that allows them to reflect on- and in- actions in order to create methodologies.

3. ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN HOLISTIC EDUCATION

Human's creations represent the belief, culture, and the living condition that shape the civilization in the respective era. The monuments like the great pyramids of Giza or Coliseum in Rome inherit the historical life of the civilization. The monument of education that is so-called school is not different. School with its educational system is the manifestation of the civilization's belief, culture, and the living condition of the people and is much influenced by the current developing paradigm.

Education in modern era grows its stem and branches on the *objectivistic*, *materialistic*, *mechanistic*, *atomistic*, or *reductionistic* ground (Miller, 2000). It regards individual human as an exclusive entity of the cosmos, viewing human as an organism whose behaviors are driven by the biological thrusts of self-preservation and reproduction. From that point of view, human tries to look itself as

the most superior creature while at the same time, human actually only sees itself as the strongest animal. Unlike animals whose conducts, as far as they can go, will still keep the sustainability of nature that supports biological diversity, humans proves itself as having the might to destroy that balance. It has been approximated by the researchers that there are as many as 30% to 50% of all species on Earth are going toward extinction by the mid-century (Chivian et al, 2008) due to the over consumption, pollution and contamination caused by human being (Dublin, 2015). Education, in the other hand, that grounds itself on reductionistic worldview has a little awareness and sense of urgency of such cataclysmic event because its mainstream idea is to fit a person in a certain occupation (J, Miller, 2007).

R, Miller (2000) added the argument that every element of schools in modern era is the sediment of reductionistic worldview. Curriculum by itself is the evidence of human experience objectification. Today's education thinks that the abundance of each individual experience can be abbreviated into several manageable variables within an artificial education's systematical instrument that is so-called school. Modern life that demands specification requires one to be specialized on something. School is the conductor of that demand, training the students on specific thing which is necessary to sustain their survival in the future. This phenomenon is utterly an attempt of disconnecting education from the holistic view of life. The school society is formed by the interaction among its inhabitants like teachers, staffs, and students that work under the rules which are established within education system (Hatcher, 1998). It means that people inside it interact to pursue the quality that they adore, which is the high score. The students are verbally, mentally, or physically rewarded and punished based on that standard quality, so are the teachers by the higher authority. As the consequences, they are in oblivion of the world connectedness with the school education, let alone the English language teaching.

When it comes to holistic education, English language teaching learning automatically cannot talk merely about English since it promotes the interconnectedness among the individual, society, humanity, nature, spirit, etc (Forbes, 2003). In holistic education, ELT is the instrument of English teacher to empower the students in order to create the agents of change in present or in the future.

3.1 The Four Pillars of Holistic Education

The four pillars of learning is formulated for methodological purpose by UNESCO. However, the four similar but slightly different pillars used in this research are taken from Nava (2001).

1) Learning to Learn

Learning to learn does not mean learning to learn effectively only. In essence it is one's effort to keep the desire of exploring the unknown. Indeed, everyone will easily say that no one knows everything. However, this is not the realization that it means because someone may realizes that he does not know something yet he does not want to know. In simple term, natural curiosity is what it seeks. In order to keep being intellectually curious, one needs to forge the skill to pay attention on the detail, perceiving, associating, analyzing, and developing intellectual intuition and creativity. By doing so, one can ask a good question. Nava (2001) said that it is the scientific awareness.

2) Learning to Do

The possession of knowledge that is not virtually fruitful for self or others is useless. Therefore, one needs to learn on how to apply it in real life. The

wisdom of understanding wisdoms is to improve life so that learning to practice what has been known and understood in effective fashion may improve life in significant way. This is an effort to self-train in making a wise call of actions. One learns to make his action more effective.

3) Learning to Live Together

Humans are social creature. Human survives by mutual cooperation. A good human possess the skills to maintain harmony with others in society and the bad human is the opposite. Learning to live together means to shape good attitudes and character that allow one to treat people around him in a good manner. Such quality will be rewarded by positive acceptance, respect and honor while the opposite quality will be punished with alienation. The quality cannot be achieved without one understands the network of life's knowledge (Nava, 2001).

4) Learning to Be

Learning to be utterly means to learn to be a human. The aim is to attain the ultimate consciousness of the human genuine essence in life. It is the state of being aware of human's original nature and roles among the other existences in the world.

4. CONCLUSION

Educational policy in Indonesia is based on the spirit of Pancasila as crystalized in the Act No. 20 of 2003 stating that education is an conscious effort to create learning and teaching process atmosphere in order that the learners improve their potential actively to possess religious spirituality power, self-control, personality, intellectuality, noble attitude, as well as skills required by themselves, society, nation, and country.

Pancasila, in the other hand, from the verse 1 to 5, literally does not have a clear statement that addresses the spirit of nature preservation. In fact, it does by referring to the first verse, "Belief in the one and only God". Pancasila acknowledges several region and all of which teach how to live in harmony with nature. That is an amplification of the importance of spiritual nurture that will only be measured under the paradigm of holistic education. Moreover, the government regulation number 20 of 2016 about standard competence of the graduates clearly state that this curriculum insists of holistic assessment of the students aspects which are the knowledge, skills, and attitude. Finally, it can be seen that holistic education and curriculum 2013 meet at the point of the development of the whole person in the society which is the domain of character education.

5. REFERENCES

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