

CREATING CHILD FRIENDLY ENGLISH CLASSROOM THROUGH THE ADOPTION OF LOCAL ENGLISH AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

The Child Right Convention articulated that education for children should be directed to respect their own cultural identity, language and values. Similarly, from the perspectives of World Englishes the teaching of English is recommended to adopt local English as a way to empower the students' local identity and accommodate their needs. This article is aimed at investigating the perspectives of English teachers working in primary education in Central Java Province, Indonesia. The data were gathered through interviews with 15 English teachers followed by questionnaires completed by 2033 English teachers. The results from the interviews showed that many teachers recognized the benefits of accommodating local English in the classroom for the children. Similarly, the majority of teachers completed the questionnaires positively predisposed of local English as the model for ELT in their local context.

Keywords: local English, CRC, ELT

ABSTRAK

Konvensi Hak Anak mengartikulasikan bahwa pendidikan untuk anak harus diarahkan untuk menghormati identitas budaya, bahasa, dan nilai-nilai mereka. Demikian pula, dari perspektif World Englishes pengajaran bahasa Inggris dianjurkan untuk mengadopsi Bahasa Inggris lokal sebagai cara untuk memberdayakan identitas lokal siswa dan mengakomodasi kebutuhan mereka. Artikel ini ditujukan untuk memaparkan perspektif guru Bahasa Inggris di pendidikan dasar di Provinsi Jawa Tengah, Indonesia. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dengan 15 guru Bahasa Inggris diikuti dengan kuesioner yang diisi oleh 2033 guru Bahasa Inggris. Hasil dari wawancara menunjukkan bahwa banyak guru mengakui manfaat dari mengakomodasi Bahasa Inggris lokal di kelas untuk anak-anak. Demikian pula, sebagian besar guru menyatakan sikap yang positif terhadap kecenderungan bahasa Inggris lokal sebagai model untuk pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris dalam konteks lokal mereka.

Kata kunci: Bahasa Inggris lokal, konvensi hak anak, Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris.

INTRODUCTION

Child Right Convention (CRC) (1990) article 29, point (c), states that the education of the child shall be directed to:

The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own (CRC, 1990)

In other words, with regards to language education, the article highly recommends that it should enable the children to develop their own local cultural identity. In a similar vein, many scholars believe that the teaching of English nowadays should accommodate the local context of the learners. Alptekin (2002) and McKay advocated (2012) the inclusion of students' local context in ELT materials. Acar (2009) believes that there is a need for the English teachers to develop their students' competence in their local variety in addition to raising their awareness of the multiple norms of English used in international contexts. In addition, the adoption of the students local variety of English not only can "enable the students to express the value of their own [culture]" (Hino, 2012, p.31) but also, in terms of pronunciation model, empower their own local (national) identity (Nihalani, 2010).

In Indonesia, people speak more than one languages, the regional languages for daily communication, Indonesian for formal occasion and foreign languages including English. Hence, the English used by Indonesians is influenced by their linguistic background (Alip, 2007; Azis, 2003; Nababan, 1983; Yuliati, 2014). Hamied (2012) pointed out that "As the Indonesian people represent an extensive number of linguistic backgrounds, we teachers should accept varieties of English" (p.76). Therefore, we can expect many local Englishes exist in Indonesia as a result of the influence of regional languages on English.

Currently, the teaching of English in Indonesia is still dominated by native speaker varieties. This practice, of course, is in contrast to the CRC (1990) article 29 in which the education should respect the local culture of the children. In addition, it disapproves the recommendation from the scholars regarding the inclusion of English variety that is relevant to the students' local context. However, whether or not the teachers are willing to accept the idea of teaching English using their local English still needs to be investigated. Therefore, this study is aimed to investigate English teachers perspectives on the adoption of local English for ELT in their context.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a sequential exploratory mixed method in which the data were gathered from interviews with 15 primary school English teachers working in schools in Central Java province followed by the questionnaires completed by 2033 primary school English teachers in the same province. In the first investigation, the teachers were interviewed on their views concerning the adoption of local English for pedagogical purpose. In the second investigation, the teachers were asked to indicate the level of their support for the adoption of local English as the model in ELT in Indonesia. However, the questionnaire also consisted of 1 open-ended question in which the respondents were given an opportunity to write their comments regarding the use of English in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From 15 English teachers being interviewed, 11 teachers supported the adoption of local English as the model for ELT in primary schools. For those positively approved of the adoption of local English, some believed it helped the students do well in tests:

I think my local English will give more benefits to my students...when they do...the test with English I think my students will get a good score (E, Interview 9)

According to interviewee Ans, the use of local English not only makes her students 'more interested in English' but also makes them 'more confident':

Well I think that is a good idea... [students are] more interested in English ... and they will listen to me and then indirectly they got it what I said...yeah they do understand...it [is] the best method to make someone become confident (Ans, Interview 14)

Three other interviewees (K, W, and E) believed that the use of their local English accommodated their students' linguistic background. As their students' first language is Javanese, the use of Javanese English in the class helps students comprehend the lessons:

...because I teach in Central Java so I think that teaching by mixing it [English] with our region [Javanese] is more appropriate so that the student can...accept it [lesson] easily (K, Interview 3)

Other interviewees were less enthusiastic, voicing the view that using their local English contradicted their personal commitment to adopting L1 speaker models. At the same time, they seemed to realize that what they preferred did not necessarily provide what their students needed. Interviewee Ma pointed out that although she disagreed with the adoption of Javanese English, she recognized that it motivated the students to speak in 'English':

they are afraid and if I force them to speak [English] may be a little bit same as the native [speaker] they will be so afraid to speak so but I think that ... as far as it [speaking] is good for them just just speak up ... it is okay for me ... but in fact actually I do not agree with with the local English (Ma, Interview 1)

Interviewee Mu found that using the local variety helped particularly in grammar lessons:

...while it is not [normally] appropriate if we use Javanese English with our students, sometimes it is helpful to...give more knowledge to our students because we have different grammar (Mu, Interview 7)

Two other interviewees (T and As) commented that, while they used their local English as it seemed to bring benefits to the students, they also felt that it may not be good for the students in the future and that their 'intelligibility' in communicating with people from other regions would be negatively impacted. Interviewee T commented:

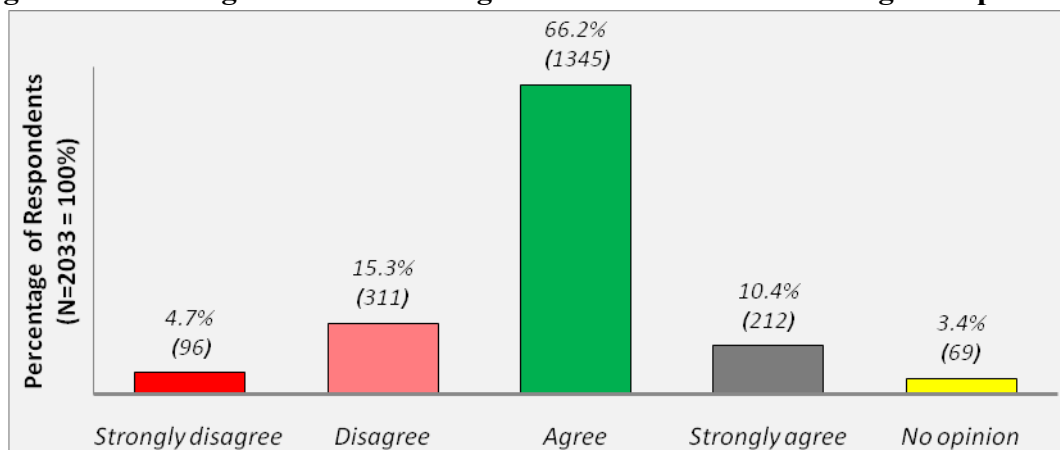
I think it will make it easier to understand what we explain and the English ...will not be so difficult for them, but I think for the future it's not so good because when maybe someday they'll go abroad or in the more extended area they will be confused because what they learn first at the elementary school [was] very different (T, Interview 6)

Four interviewees disapproved of adopting a local variety of English as the model for ELT, with one interviewee (Amn) claiming that it would change 'the meaning' of what was said, although she did not explain how local English changed meaning. Three interviewees (H, Ar, and Arn) believed that L1 speaker varieties are more appropriate than their own local English variety since these varieties of English were perceived as 'correct', and 'original' English. Ironically, although interviewee Ar preferred L1 speaker varieties, she also admitted that the use of local English was inevitable:

I would not use my local English when I teach my students because...the way the teacher pronounce the words... will be different from American or British English and sometimes it doesn't match with the original English...but I know that it will be difficult for the teacher because...their mother tongue sometimes influence not sometimes but often ... influences the way...the teachers...pronounce or the way the teacher speaks using English (Ar, Interview 11)

The approval of using local English was also clear in the questionnaire results which showed that nearly 76% of respondents agreed that teachers should teach the variety of English from their local region (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Local English should be taught in the classroom according to respondents



The approval of local English is also shown from the comments in the open-ended section:

We need to consider students' ability to comprehend the lesson when we are teaching English, particularly in pronouncing vocabulary by using our own dialect. (Respondent 359)

There were several factors that contributed to the perceived value of adopting Javanese English. First, the participants recognized that English as an international language belongs to

anyone who speaks the language. Therefore, the perceived goal of teaching English does not necessarily mean achieving native-like pronunciation. Second, they were aware that adopting native speaker model was unattainable and irrelevant to the contexts in which they were currently teaching. Third, although they recognized the important role of English as an international language, they were aware that maintaining their own identity was equally important. This was also confirmed by respondents who commented on the importance of learning English vocabulary by adopting local dialect.

The results of this study, in which the integration of local culture into the teaching of English was supported by teachers, are in line with previous studies. In Chile, McKay (2003) found that the teachers from public schools strongly supported the inclusion of cultural content in ELT material since they believed that it was important to maintain and to reinforce Chilean culture. In a study conducted by Hartono and Aydawati (2011), teachers from various levels of education in Semarang, Central Java, demonstrated positive attitudes towards the use of Indonesian environment-based teaching materials. Kirkpatrick (2007) reported that university students in *Bandung*, West Java, were in favour of textbooks that incorporated Indonesian-based materials and gave them access to topics of cultural significance to Indonesia and, thus, equipped them to be able to talk about their own culture and concerns in English to other people. Intani (2012) found that third grade class of primary school students in Semarang, Central Java, had strong interest in learning English using modified Indonesian children's song lyrics, since they were perceived them as comprehensible, enjoyable, and motivating.

CONCLUSION

The results of the interviews indicate that many of the teachers recognised the adoption local English in the classroom can bring several benefits, these being: it can accommodate the linguistic background of the students and has some practical value in the classroom: it makes the students comprehend the lesson easier; it is useful for teaching English grammar; it can motivate the students to speak; it can be used to attract students' attention; it helps to build student self-confidence; and, it can help the students do well in the English test. Interestingly, the agreement for the adoption of local English in the classroom is also shown by the majority of teachers participated in the study. This means most English teachers in Central Java context are aware of the role of local English in creating child friendly classroom. They acknowledge that the use of local English in English classroom can be seen as a way to respect their students' own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living (CRC, 1990) since the local English not only builds the children self confidence but also empowers their cultural identity.

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