

INTERCULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS IN DEVELOPING ELT MATERIALS FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract: Intercultural considerations in developing ELT materials for young learners are based on the following concepts: a) children's concepts and categories of things that they know, and b) the interrelationship between the first language, second language, and mental organization. In this context, the role of the teacher is the main supplier and organizer of English language input. In developing materials for young learners (under 14 years old) the implication of the above concepts can be seen in the selection of certain local values that promote cultural and environmental awareness. For the third- and fourth-grade students, the "big-book" concept for the media is proposed, with the picture in the middle and the exercises around the picture. It is aimed at teaching how to greet people appropriately, knowing alphabets, describing different kinds of numbers and mealtime schedules, describing how to prepare certain foods, etc. This will enable children to apply the English language concepts and use it in their daily life.

Key words: ELT materials for Young Learners, intercultural context, role of teacher, big-book.

English for elementary school children known as English for Young Learners in Indonesia was stated in the 1994 Curriculum. Some schools

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started to teach English at the fourth grade but some at the first grade. In

East Java, elementary school children at the end of sixth grade are expected to have the capability to read, listen, speak and write in English using simple sentences with a 500 words vocabulary and 2 hours of lesson per week. Thus, materials development has to cater for students from the first grade till the sixth grade.

Another point to be considered is the role of the teacher in teaching English. The English teacher functions as the role model for the children especially in speaking. He or she has to know the characteristics of young learners so that the choice of certain strategies in implementing the above concept can be done.

The third point in materials development of ELT materials is to consider the context of nature, society and culture of Indonesia and its influence in the choice of materials. Intercultural considerations in developing ELT materials for young learners are based on the children's concepts and categories of things that they know. The children who are used to drinking milk for breakfast refer to liquids such as gasoline as "milk" for the car (Cameron, 1994:28-39) but Indonesian children considered gasoline as "water" for the car. The difference in the choice of words to teach the concept of certain things in English within the Indonesian context has to be considered. The interrelationship between the first language, second language, and mental organization of a child will build the schemata in the child's mind of a "new" concept within the old concept. It will build the blocks of cognition and make understanding of it easier.

Children from an early age are expected to be aware of the importance of environmental education. Jacobs (1995:271) states "...the growth of environmental education reflects a new way that humans view nature. We believe that many of the changes in human's view of the environment have parallels in current trends in language teaching methodology...". It is hoped that the children will grow up as adults who have positive views on the importance of environmental education.

In relation to the above factors the choice of certain strategies and media functions as the trigger for the success in teaching English for young learners. One of the proposed strategy is story telling and the "big book" concept for children in the third grade and fourth grade. The materials are about English language teaching within an Indonesian context. This is related to contextual language teaching that promotes motivations

and learning becomes useful, fun and interesting for children as they are connected with things familiar to them (Wright, 1995:14).

This paper reports on materials development of English language for the third and fourth year students. The discussion begins with the concepts of developing materials for young learners, the teacher's role in implementing the English language concepts, the importance of environmental education, the choice of strategy used: story telling and media: big book within the context of nature, society and culture of Indonesia, followed by some brief descriptions of real use of English in every day life activities from the book. Finally, the teacher's language tips provided in the book functions as additional suggestions for other activities in the class for the teacher and the students.

This report is addressed to EYL teachers in Indonesia and other countries in order to share the importance of intercultural considerations in developing the materials. It also provides them with pedagogical experience on how to teach English for Young Learners within a nation of various ethnic groups, religion and cultural beliefs. The significance of this practice lies on the importance of intercultural considerations in the materials chosen which is related to the success of teaching English for Young Learners.

ADVANTAGES OF EARLY FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

The reason for proposing the provision of English language education from the first grade onwards is based on research and personal observation as stated by Freudenstein (1991:18-19). He stated that there are three factors that support early foreign language learning. The first factor is *intellectual improvement* of the children that they tend to be superior to their monolingual friends. According to Freudenstein, that intellectually a child's experience with two language systems enable the child to have greater mental flexibility, superiority in concept formation and a greater diversified set of mental abilities. The second factor is *mother-tongue improvement*. The children are aware of language as a social phenomenon and understand their native language system better. It is based on research findings that as the basic development of one's mother tongue comes to an end at the early age of four or five there is actually no minimal damaging influence from other languages on L1 competency. The third factor is *cul-*

tural gains of the children's view of the world. Those with the opportunity to be safely exposed to other languages and cultures will be helped to develop tolerance towards people who are different from them which in the long run will help them in contributing towards mutual understanding between nations. He proposed that only with certain favorable teaching situations can positive cultural values be reached. The factors are as follows:

1. small learning groups
2. suitable teaching aids
3. appropriate methodological approaches
4. properly trained teachers

In the Indonesian context related to materials development, classrooms in EYL consist of 20-40 students that can still be considered as small learning group. Suitable teaching aids are "big books" made from available materials or textbooks. The teachers have to undergo sufficient training such as at SUM. This program is called S1 PGSD that deals with the in-service training of undergraduate elementary school teachers. It is hoped that they can use and make their own teaching materials or adapt materials from commercial textbook such as "FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools".

Alongside with advantages, Freudenstein discussed the problems connected to an early start. The first one is the problem of continuity. In the Indonesian context, the problem of materials development has been overcome by the approach of spiral and graded systems starting from the elementary level to the secondary level. The materials at the first grade use simple sentences while at the fourth grade it uses complicated ones. The grammar system of the English language at the primary levels starts with mostly simple present tense and becomes more complex at the secondary level.

The second problem is promoting language awareness by connecting children's understanding of the new language with their mother tongue. In the Indonesian context, related to materials development the "FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools" book proposes the linking of new concepts with languages spoken in their own country or local content. This is possible as Indonesia itself is a nation with more than one language spoken with Bahasa Indonesia as the formal

language. It is hoped that the children will be well equipped and in a better position to have a preference for the languages used for professional or private purposes. Thus, advantages of early language learning are connected with the materials development caters to the above needs.

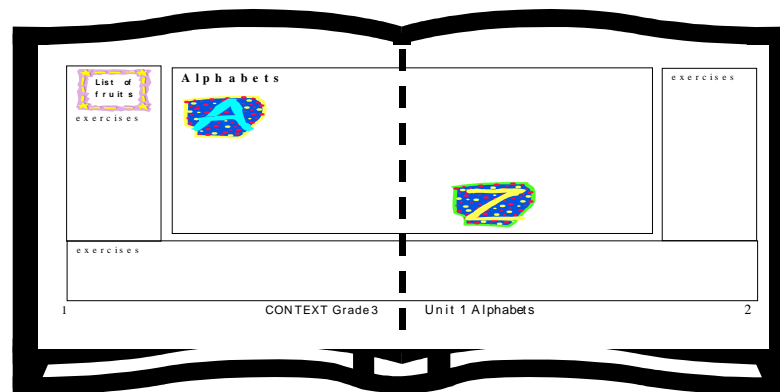
THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Teacher training in the past only involves training teachers for the secondary or tertiary levels. But in the past few years, teacher training programs have included the “English for Young Learners” course also known as EYL. The completion of the EYL training provides graduates the skills to teach adults as well as young learners of English language.

The function of teachers in the class for Young Learners is as maintainers of communication (Bloor, 1991:146-147). The EYL text does not contain oral responses to activities in the class and so the teachers have to overcome the problem of a “silent” class. The teacher then develops a strategy to connect the questions at hand with the knowledge the children have acquired. It can take the form of modified elicitation, translation to the mother tongue or replacement elicitation.

Related with materials development, in FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools book series for the third grade, Unit 2 about Fruits, the teacher can ask the students to point out green colored fruits in the picture. The teacher can point to the green colored fruits or even translate it into Indonesian. In the exercises on the next page the students are asked to draw and color fruits that they know are grown in their neighborhood. The above approach is also based on “Contextual Teaching and Learning” components (Johnson, 2002:45) to make connections between classroom activities and real life situations. In Unit 7: Hobbies, verb action words such as “kneel” are put in the form of games or activities to be performed physically in class. Children can also follow the words of a poem with physical and verbal sounds. The teacher functions as role model and motivator in class.

The content of the above lessons are put into the big book format where the picture of the whole content of the unit is in the center of two pages. The example of the lay out of the materials is as follows:



ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS FROM A VERY YOUNG AGE

According to IEEP, there are three things to be considered: 1) the importance of environmental awareness; 2) exposing children from a very young age; 3) to develop IEEP materials; 4) implementation of materials development of children's language textbooks (Jacobs, 1995:269-279) as follows:

1. **Awareness.** The aim is to help individuals and social groups acquire an awareness of and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems. For example, people reading a passage about air pollution could make students aware of this problem and the danger it poses. Related to materials development in the FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools series, grade three unit 22 about "Things around the Park" is about a passage on how to keep our park clean. The students are expected to fill in things related to the above concept such as "do not throw away your rubbish on the grass".
2. **Knowledge.** It aims to help individuals and social groups acquire basic understanding of the total environment, its associated problems and humanity's critically responsible presence and role in it. For example, a text for listening comprehension could include information which would increase student's knowledge about the causes of air pollution and possible solutions to the problem. Related to materials development in FUN WITH ENGLISH: Con-

textual English for Elementary Schools series, some of the exercises are catered to make students aware of the danger of pollution by telling them to make posters of anti pollution movement.

3. **Attitude.** To help individuals and social groups acquire social values, strong feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation for actively participating in its protection and improvement. For example, a story or song about endangered species could encourage students to care about protecting such creatures. In the FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools series, students are asked to make a poem or write a post-card about the beauty of a clean environment.
4. **Skills.** To help individuals and social groups acquire the skills for solving environmental problems. These include scientific and technological skills, but also language skills. For example, students can use their language ability to write pamphlets informing people about the risks caused by air pollution or letters to corporations or government bodies urging them to take action. Similarly, oral language skills would be important in convincing people to take action to decrease air pollution. In the FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools series, the materials development is based on language skills used in everyday activities using simple sentences.
5. **Evaluation ability.** To help individuals and social groups evaluate environmental measures and education programs in terms of ecological, political, economic, social, aesthetics, and educational factors. While everyone agrees that we must do something to protect the environment, there are many disagreements about how to do it. For instance, when they go shopping, students need to use reading and reasoning skills to evaluate which products are environmentally friendly or which are unnecessary. In the FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools series, the students are exposed to healthy food: fresh fish, meat, vegetables, fruits, etc. and not to junk food.
6. **Participation.** To help individuals and social groups develop a sense of responsibility and urgency regarding environmental problems; to ensure appropriate action to solve those problems. All the

other five objectives come to nothing if students and others don't translate their awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills, and evaluation ability into action. In the materials development of the series, the exercises are translated into real life actions. FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools

Related to the above concepts of environmental awareness, Jacobs (1995:272) also proposed the following methodological features below and its relation with the materials development of the FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools series.

Table 1. Materials Development of FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools related to Trends in Language Instruction and Their Environmental Parallels of Jacobs

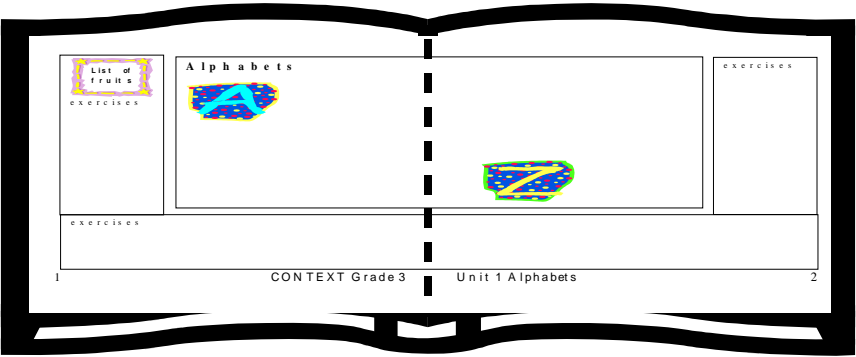
#	New Views of the Environment and Their Implications	New Trends in Instruction and Their Implications
1	View: nature has the right to be active and exist independent of people Examples: nature reserves; protection of endangered species	View: students should be active; independence should be encouraged. Implications: learner-centeredness; education linked with the communities where students live. In FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools series, the materials are learner-centeredness and linked with communities where the students live such as the Hindu belief in Bali, the Islam belief in other areas.
2	View: diversity in nature is recognized and encouraged. Examples: protecting biodiversity	View: diversity among students is recognized and encouraged. Implications: learner-centeredness; using methods which suit a variety of different learning styles. In the FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools series, some of the students are quick learners and at the teachers' language

		tips, additional proposed exercises are given.
3	View: nature exists best as an integrated whole. Examples: protecting the entire web of life.	View: students learn best when knowledge is presented as an integrated whole. Implications: integrated curriculum; theme/content based instruction. The FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools series proposed the integrated curriculum where the children learn the language and know how to use it in real life activities.
4	View: concern for the long-term effect on the environment of the production process. Examples: alternative energy; reusing and recycling materials; reducing the amount used.	View: concern for the process and long term effect of instruction. Implications: learning how to learn; thinking skills; intrinsic motivation; links with the communities where students live. In the FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools series, the students are exposed to use of natural ingredients in their food consumption, and know the difference of polluted transportation as means of transportation vs healthy transportations means.
5	View: humans should join with nature Examples: more time spent on outdoor activities; real plants in homes	View: teachers should join with students. Implications: teachers read and write along with students; before and while students and teachers collaborate, teachers model the behaviors they want students to use. In the FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools

		series, several units are discussing about outdoor activities where the children and the teacher are involved.
6	View: cooperation, not competition, between nature and humans is emphasized. Examples: we seek to live with nature, not to conquer it; not using products made from endangered species.	View: cooperation, not competition, between students is emphasized. Implications: cooperative learning techniques; collaborate skills taught. In the FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools series, materials development involve the description of beautiful tourist places in the students' own areas that they have to maintain.

Materials Development of FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools: Grade Three and Grade Four

Materials development of textbook in English for Young Learners is based on Gonzales's view (1995:3) that is "... is integrated but attempts to do communication and interaction, explain grammar in simple words, and is rich in games and activities (to become interesting for children)...". Example of a big book presentation:



The FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools series, Grade Three, consist of topics related to everyday activities and is used as the medium of approach in the "big book". The students

are exposed to vocabulary and language functions followed by visual exposure of the content. The activities are based on the information in the picture and the exercises that follow. The children will better absorbable to the English language context visually by the looking at the book and audio input from the teacher as well.

The topics in the Grade Three book of FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools series for the first semester are as follows: *alphabet, fruits, numbers, vegetables, campsite, animals, verbs (games), verbs, homes, homes (upstairs), batik, things around the house*; and for the second semester: *parts of the body, seasonal clothing, at the swimming pool, things around the swimming pool, farm animals, things around the house (kitchen), meal times, homes (downstairs), our beautiful park, dan things around the park*.

The FUN WITH ENGLISH: Contextual English for Elementary Schools series Grade Four is a continuation of topics and exercises presented at Grade Three that is more difficult and complicated. The topics are as follows for the first semester: *introducing oneself, in the classroom, greetings, parts of the body, food, multiply and divide, art and drama, at the theatre, names of the day, barbeque parties, at the market, rujak party, celebrating your birthday, grandma's birthday*; and for the second semester: *kinds of job, when I grow up, daily routines, time sport, transportation, places, toy store, sunset at Kuta beach, Bali, names of job, and traditional houses*.

In each unit, the first two pages are used for the integrated information in the form of a picture in the middle and exercises around the picture followed by two pages with exercises only. At the end of each semester there is an evaluation exercise based on the materials in the semester, so there are two evaluation exercises.

CONCLUSIONS

This report is addressed to EYL teachers in Indonesia and other countries in order to share the importance of intercultural considerations in developing ELT materials for young learners. It also provides teachers with pedagogical experience on how to teach English for Young Learners within a nation of many ethnic groups, religion and cultural beliefs. The role of the teacher is not only as the model but also participant. Materials

developers should also bear in mind that teachers and students are also learning how to improve their English language competency as well. The significance of this practice lies in the importance of intercultural considerations in the selection of materials related the success of teaching English for Young Learners. It is then hoped that English language materials that share intercultural considerations will promote the ability of young learner to apply it in real life situation, young people who are proud of their mother tongue, beliefs, cultural diversities, will be able to use English efficiently in real life situations.

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