
TEACHING ENGLISH TO MIGRANTS IN PEKANBARU: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF BEING NON L1 SPEAKER TEACHER IN MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM

Dewi Sari Wahyuni
STMIK Amik Riau

email: dewisariwahyuni@stmik-amik-riau.ac.id

Abstract

Teaching English in Non English Speaking Countries needs a bigger effort for the little expose availability. As an Indonesian who teaches English to Indonesian, the writer still faces some difficulties. Therefore, it is a great challenge and opportunity that when International Organization of Migration assigns the writer to teach English to migrants from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraqi, Syria, Palestine, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Myanmar and even Sri Lanka. English is a media for communicating in multicultural environment such as detention house and community housings where these migrants stay before they are sent to their destination country or deported to their country of origin. The courses are done in Pekanbaru, Indonesia. As Non Native English Speaker, the writer gets used to teaching classroom to students with similar mother tounge. It is not easy, indeed, to deal with students from different countries who are diverse in languages. As the show must go on, the writer learns by doing. From arranging materials to the approaches have gone trials and errors. No matter how big the challenge is there are always be advantages and disadvantages that should be anticipated by the writer as teacher. In this paper, the writer will talk about her perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of being not able to communicate in students first language in multilingual English Classroom.

Keywords: *Teaching English to Migrants, Advantages and Disadvantages, Non-Native and Non L1 Teacher*

1. INTRODUCTION

The writer considered the challenge provided by International Organization of Migration (IOM) as an opportunity to learn and experience something new and different. It was teaching English to migrants in Pekanbaru. These migrants are under protection of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Their basic needs including education are managed by IOM which provides them with one of their need of having English course. Over thousands migrants from different countries have stayed temporarily in Pekanbaru. They are from Afghanistan, Iraqi, Iran, Palestine, Syria, Pakistan, Srilanka, Somalia, Sudan, Myanmar and Rohingya. In their settlement, Detention House and Community Housings, babies, children, men and women gathered and lived together in the multicultural society with different cultures and languages.

Almost all of these migrants admitted that it was hard for them to live with others who are totally different from their cultures and traditions, not to mention languages. These differences bring about problems to these migrants socialization in Indonesia as their temporary staying country. Indonesia is not their country of destination. They stay here before they are sent to their country of destination or deported to their country of origin. As languages spoken among them are vary, they need to use language as medium which enables them to communicate in order to settle any problems that might occur in this multicultural society. As the world language, Lingua Franca, English is necessary for them to learn.

Is English really necessary? Yes, indeed, it is. As a medium to communicate with others from different countries, English helps them. It is also an official language to communicate with IOM, UNHCR, Immigration and Detention House officers. Since their destination countries are obviously

English Speaking Countries such Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States and Canada, acquiring English as their second or foreign language is a must. It will be much of benefit for their settlement in one of those countries mentioned above.

The writer has been assigned to teach these migrants English since August 2015. There are several classes, differentiated to children, women and men. Most of these migrants do mind when students, especially adults with both genders have to study together in one classroom like those migrants from Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraqi and Syria. They are not comfortable with these genders mixed class at all. The women from the said country do not interact a lot with other people here in Indonesia but their family. Therefore, the treatment to these classes should be different.

In these multilingual classes the students communicate in many languages as their mother tongue differs from each other. While teaching in a class where the learners speak with similar mother tongue, the writer as Non Native Speaker Teacher (NNST) still faced difficulties, teaching in the multilingual classes had more complex issues. Some of migrants even had traveled to several countries before they arrived in Indonesia. These people can even speak more than one language. And since the students are from various countries, many languages can be heard during teaching and learning process. It was a big challenge for the writer, but still it is mesmerizing.

TEACHING ENGLISH TO MIGRANTS

For migrants, monolinguals can no longer be persisted, in view of the fact that they move from one country to another to find a better life. Bilingualism or even multilingualism is usually unavoidable. They should be able to speak languages other than their mother tongue to survive. Here, in Indonesia, it is necessary for them to understand or to be able to speak Indonesian because they should mingle with Indonesians, no matter what. Going to the hospital, going to the market or other places for their basic needs require them to interact with Indonesian people whom most of them do not even speak English. And in interacting with UNHCR, IOM and Immigration officers, they should be able to use English, too. It is no longer phenomenon for them, but a must.

Most of these migrants are from conflict countries. And UNHCR and IOM are involved in helping them. So, there are people outside of their countries come and go as soldiers, medical staffs, voluntaries and others to help the victims of these conflicts. These helpers mingle around and socialize with the migrants. Therefore, they get expose to other languages more than any other people in peaceful countries although these languages are not demanded in their workforces and educational systems. The need for better life has brought about multilingualism in some of them. They get together with people from various countries in Detention Houses or Community Housings and have to live with different language groups and cultures. Some of them can speak two or more languages that can make different where they ever lived and may determine their educational and career choices later on.

As international language, English has been used worldwide, as first, second or third language. Jessner (2006) believes one of the factors in creating multilingualism is English. Therefore, the need to learn English in this globalization era is manifest. Especially in the migrants' society, most of them who learned English have spoken more than one language. Despite all of the reasons and conditions that make these migrants leave their countries of origin and stayed in several countries with different languages before they are be able to be sent to their destination country, they are fortunate with recognizing more than one language. It is essential for all of the people in the world; family hereditary, residences, educational purpose, work demand, and etcetera.

Having known other languages than what is learnt is helpful for the migrants to develop their target language. However, many of the them considered it is difficult because the do not take the benefit of acquiring their own language and use it to the understanding of English as the target language. Therefore, the writer as a teacher tries to guide them learning English by using their understanding on components of their own language or others that they acquire. This way of learning connect the migrants way of thinking to English which makes it easier for them to figure out what is going on with their own learning.

ADVANTAGES

In a multilingual class, like these migrants class, there can be much more use of the target language, because it will be the only common language between the learners, who will use it for their normal interactions both in and out of class. Learners' behavior and cultures can be different, which may create problems but can be used as a focus of comparison and discussion.

The ability to acquire more than one language has been proven to cause unsimilar connection in the learners' brain which bestows them with more opportunity to be advanced compared with those who are monolinguals. Multilinguals are better than monolinguals in thinking flexibility and experience so that they have less difficulties in handling the learning problem and are able to think out of the box (Lambert, 1985). This can also be found in migrant classes although they do not realize it prior to. They have noticed the rules from other languages, reflexively, as well as knowledge on grammar; they are aware of the comparison of their own language(s) to the target language. Moreover, they can categorized sociocultural and sociolinguistic variables and function.

Being more proficient at differences in languages despite of their broken English has made them unique learners, richer than monolinguals in language varieties, noticing official and slank. This kind of plus as multilinguals is called language and metalinguistic awareness (Jessner, 2006; Svalberg 2007). Referring to recognizing and capability in understanding of language structure and function is known as metalinguistic awareness.

These languages such as mother tongue and others influence the way they learn and speak English as well as their way of thinking. Teaching in multilingual class enables the writer facing many different errors covering a greater range than monolinguals. And it is a priceless experience to the writer professional development as teacher.

As the writer does not speak students' L1, the students tries to use their English the most when they have to speak with the writer. So, between the arguments on using L1 in L2 class or using merely L2 in class, the writer still take advantages. The use of English in these migrants classes as target language is usually more than that in Indonesian student classes that the writer also teaches.

The tendency of students excessive L1 usage in the classroom (Harbord, 1992) can be prevented for they do want to communicate with the teacher. The effect is like the one who live in English speaking country and have to speak in English or they miscommunicate. This condition is really different from the writer's Indonesian classes, where the students sometimes do not trust their capability in English. They demanded translation while they are able to digest it in English.

The writer inability in students L1 increase their opportunity in practicing English because they want the teacher to pay attention to them, understand what they need and, perhaps, realizing or not, this automatically improve the students' English language skills essentially.

DISADVANTAGES

The writer, at first was unable to speak the majority languages used by the students; Arabic, Persian or Burmese. For the students with low competence, learning English is not easy. While some of the experts believe that when one learns new language, is better to do it with translation. This translation is natural to build the concept of learning. These migrants also have tendency to learn by translation, especially for basic vocabulary. The transition of switching between and among languages and translation occurs to any language learners and L1 is as important as L2. (Cook, 2001; Woodall, 2002). For these reasons, teachers should try to work with this innate tendency rather than against it. However, the writer is not able to present that for she is a NNST and to make it worst, she is also Non L1 teacher.

It occurs in writer's thinking that reinforcing English and forbidding communication in other languages but English with punishment would be helpful in developing their learning. However, Goldstein (2003) stated that students merely stop talking, employ their L1 still silently, and do not feel comfortable and feel humiliated because of the punishment in using their own language in a class where the students' L1 was not even permitted in private circumstances, and there were punishments for using

mother tongue. Therefore the writer do not force them the students to use merely English in the classroom. By learning English, they develop knowledge in how to live their life. This learning also will help them to see their own language and culture from different perspectives. Using L1 helps students to get sense that learning English is a positive experience since they are able to access the priceless resource which assists them to develop. It is their nature and there is nothing wrong with it (Milambiling, 2011). For this reason, the writer cannot help much.

According to Harbord (1992), communicating with students in their mother tongue improves teacher-student rapport. The capability using L1 with students will bring efficiency and more time for classroom activities. To achieve this efficiency, the writer asked for students' assistance in translating the explanation whenever English explanation or English instruction were too difficult for them to understand. This also prevent frustration on both teacher and students.

2. DISCUSSION

The importance of using L1 in L2 had been argued for long time. It is necessary as well as unavoidable. Regardless the opinion of using L1 in L2 will slower the students' development in learning L2, the writer who is NNST and does not speak L1 and has to teach L2 has faced more complex issues by using merely L2.

Low competence admit that teacher with L1 help them to understand English grammar and rules. However, this makes them reluctant to speak in English. Students with average skills, said that it is no problem for them with teacher inability to their L1. They can learn English more in English, than learning English with their L1. It prevails the same with high competence students. As they acquire the basic and only need practice to be more fluent.

3. CONCLUSION

These migrants learn English for their now and future life purpose. They want to add English to the languages which they have already spoken. The writer finds it interesting as leading them to realize their strength in multilingual classroom by bringing one language to another. The writer who is not capable in their L1 can only guide them to build up their language awareness and to apply their linguistic and pragmatic knowledge in their L1 to the learning of English. Students are able to acknowledge the similarities and differences of languages.

The writer role as teacher who does not speak students L1 cannot be taken as granted. The students efforts in communicating with the teacher in English has contributed positive learning progress. Even the English illiteracy ones has started to comunicate in English throughout their socialization to each other.

REFERENCES

- Cook, V. 1995. Multi-competence and the learning of many languages. *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 8 (2): 93-98
- Garcia, O. 2008. Multilingual language awareness and teacher education. In *Encyclopedia of Language and Education 6: Knowledge about language*. 2nd ed. Ed. J. Cenoz and N.H. Hornberger, 385-400, New York: Springer
- Harbord, J. 1992. The use of mother tongue in the classroom. *ELT Journal*, 46/3, 350-355
- Jessner, U. 2006. *Linguistic awareness in multilinguals: English as a third language*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburg University Press
- Lambert, W.E. 1985. Some cognitive and sociocultural consequences of being bilingual. In *Perspectives on bilingualism and bilingual education*, ed. J. Alatis and J. Staczek, 116-31. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

-
- Milambiling, J. 2011. Bringing one language to another: Multilingualism as a resource in the language classroom. *English Teaching Forum*. 49(1):18-25, 35
- Seth, V. 2005. *Two lives: A memoir*. New York: HarperCollins
- Svalberg, A. 2007. Language awareness and language learning. *Language Teaching* 40 (4): 287-308.