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# USING MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVE IN DESIGNING ENGLISH CURRICULUM FOR ISLAMIC PRIMARY EDUCATION DEPARTMENT AT *IAIN SMH BANTEN*

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## **Abstract**

English for Islamic Studies (EIS) constitutes one of the compulsory subjects offered, not only at both junior and senior high schools, but also at the Islamic higher education institution that should be taken by all the students, mostly with multicultural backgrounds. One of the main objectives of teaching English is not only helping the students to master English for the purpose of communicating but also the understanding of the English cultural aspects.

Anyone wishing to communicate successfully with people having a difference culture must have some understanding of this new culture. EIS teachers, therefore, should incorporate culture in the teaching and learning process. However, EIS textbooks and classroom practice often focus on linguistic knowledge and ignore the target language culture that would enable the learners to perform appropriately in the target language. To enable both lecturers and students to achieve this objective, therefore, an appropriate syllabus and multicultural perspective should be designed comprehensively.

**Key Words:** *Multicultural, Curriculum, and Islamic Primary Education.*

## **Introduction**

During my time as a lecturer at some higher education institutions, I found the students to be relaxed in their expression of ideas about diversity. When I touched on the issues of multicultural, the students showed interest. Unfortunately, there was no student who raised the questions, making us chuckle. Lessons multicultural can be stimulating for students, but how we teach it with Islamic perspective?

Realizing the important role played by English in various sectors of life, the Indonesian government makes it as the most prior foreign language to learn at schools. English constitutes one of the compulsory subjects offered, not only at both junior and senior high schools, but also at the higher education institution, i.e. at university level in Indonesia. In the higher education institution curriculum, it falls under the subject group of what usually named *Mata Kuliah Dasar Umum* (General Stipulated Basic Courses). Islamic higher education as part of the Indonesian higher education system, therefore,

offers the English subject to be taken by all of the students from different faculties and departments. One of the main objectives in teaching English at the Islamic higher educations, especially at the undergraduate program, run either by the government or both private independent foundations and private foundations under certain religious organizations in Indonesia, such as the State Islamic University (UIN), the State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN), and the State College for Islamic Studies (STAIN) as well the Islamic faculties in the secular or general universities, is primarily in order their students, mostly with multilingual background, are able to read the textbooks and articles on Islam written in English by both Muslims and non-Muslims. In general all schools are able to realize a good English program that fulfilled some aspects in teaching learning, such as curriculum, syllabus and teaching material.

Since the textbooks and articles to handle deal widely with different subjects in the field of Islamic studies, the English to be taught can then be included as part of English for special purposes or English for specific purposes (ESP). ESP is defined by Hutchinson and Water (1989:21) as “. . . an approach to language teaching which aims to meet the needs of particular learners.” Meanwhile, Language teachers must realize the importance of seeing culture as integrated at all levels of language. With emerge of more and more non-native speakers English, with the growth of more and more multilingual societies, with internalization and globalization, it is vital to integrate culture norms with language teaching.

This principle include learning for the acquisition of social skills important for interacting with students from other racial, ethnic, religious and cultural groups; learning to understand universal values shared by all cultural groups such as compassion, justice, equality, tolerance, peace, freedom and care; learning about possible stereotypes and other related bias that could produce deleterious effects on racial, ethnic and religious relations.

In practice, teachers can, for example, assign students with meaningful tasks such as a case study, problem-solving approach and discovery learning, which will help students demonstrate universal values shared by other religious and ethnic groups, and critically analyze, weigh and evaluate prejudices. In addition, the students who come from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds are unavoidable to bring them, too. The various different cultural systems meet in school and classroom and can cause a cultural conflict, which can only be mediated and reconciled by the effectiveness of the instructional process that enlightens and opens the awkward, diluted cultural boundaries.

Based on the fact above, it is assumed that Islamic Higher Institutions (IHI) need to integrate multicultural in language teaching in developing students' proficiency supported by syllabus and material. One of the institutions is *Institute Agama Islam Negeri Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin* (State Institute for Islamic studies, IAIN SMH) Banten. It has been developing a syllabus and teaching for characterized by learner's need to use English as a means of communication. In this institution, the learners have more change to use English in everyday communication activities. The crucial problem to discuss deals with is the English curriculum and syllabus. It is very necessary to know previously designing syllabus and teaching material. Those two interrelated aspects function and play each role to form English language teaching. Therefore, the main problem of this paper can be formulated as follows: How to integrate multicultural as well as the local context in English language teaching? In connection to the main problem, and more questions are: 1) how do the teachers define the objective of English

teaching that enable the students to use English as communication? 2) How do teachers design learning activities? 3) How do the students and teachers play their roles in English teaching that is oriented towards the development students' communicative competence? 4) How do teacher develop teaching procedures and teaching materials that are oriented towards the development of the students' communicative competence and appreciate the various different cultures?

### **The Relation between Language and Multicultural.**

The concept of language teaching now is that of concentration in what the learners learn or want to learn rather than what is to be taught. As the classrooms get more learner-centered, it can be assumed that the attitude and the initiatives from the learners' side will be more prominent. Since a person is shaped by one's culture and local setting, we can assume that the importance of multicultural context in language teaching will grow as learning becomes more learner centered. It is in conjunction with this shift of emphasis away from teaching and towards learning, that there has appeared a growing awareness of the role played by culture in the classroom. (Sowden C, 2007, p. 304).

In fact, It is not only the learners that come with their own culture in the classroom, the teachers also bring their own culture. This is particularly true if the language teacher is not from the locality. Sowden warns the teacher "to be aware not only of the cultures of their students and their environment, but also of the cultures that they themselves bring to the classroom" (Sowden, 2007, p.305). Thus, it can be seen, however inconclusive, that culture of both the teacher and learner plays an important role in the language learning environment and they have to be addressed for effective learning to take place. This intricate mutual relationship between language and culture may be the key to unlock the language teaching methodologies of the future. Whenever we talk about language and its use, it is important to figure out the relation between language and culture.

During the last few decades, multiculturalism has discussed a little about how we appreciate and respect the religious or belief diversity and variety of cultural wealth. There was a tendency of homogenization introduced systematically through the education under the national cultural protection, the hegemony of Javanese culture as a center and others as the edge and pauperization of culture by shortening the variety of cultural identity into a number of Indonesian provinces.

Multiculturalism is a term often used to describe societies with a proliferation of different cultures and it is about significant *educational change*. To support this idea, around the world wealthy countries have large numbers of immigrants with their own cultures and languages. This multicultural reality has caused problems in some nations, but also has led to cultural exchanges that have benefited both groups. For instance, the introduction of the instant food of the western country to Indonesia such as McDonald, Kentucky fried chicken, etc., has revolutionized Indonesian eating. The term "multicultural" can also be used to refer to localities in cities where people of different cultures co-exist. HAR Tilaar (2004) in his book *Multiculturalism Global Challenging and National Education Transformation in the Future* emphasizes multiculturalism has complex meaning. It has two basic points; the need of recognition and cultural pluralism.

In Indonesia, the heavy pressure toward integration and national unity since its independence provided a different setting for the role of multiculturalism. The nation's collective memory had been traumatized by the tension and violence resulting from various attempts at secession based on ideological, regional, cultural, as well as territorial differences and the efforts to terminate those attempts (Mahfud, 2009). Yet, by the national motto of *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) in *Pancasila* (The State philosophy), the emphasis on unity should not neglect diversity. Education that stressed only unity above all would produce narrow-mindedness and uproot individuals out of their indigenous heritage.

According to Lie (2001:43), multicultural perspective in Indonesia is needed to foster peace, understanding and respect among all members of society. The perspectives in multicultural education encompass many dimensions of human difference: race, ethnicity, occupation, socioeconomic status, age, gender, sexual orientation, various physical traits and needs, religion, and culture. Nieto (2000) states that multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities, and teacher reflect. Hernandez (2001:6) gives a clearer understanding for us about multicultural education is a vision what education can be, should be, and must be for all students. In the words of Ramsey “multicultural education is not a set curriculum but a perspective that reflected in all decision about every phase and aspect of teaching. It is a lens through which teacher can scrutinize their choices in order to clarify what social information they are conveying overtly and covertly to their students” (Ramsey, 1987).

Based on the description above, educator should be aware of and be responsible for underlying goals and values of curriculum, syllabus, material designs and activities they deliver to the students. In order for teaching and learning to be accessible and fair for various background and origins of students, cultures need to be clearly understood. Such understanding can be achieved by analyzing education from various cultural perspectives by which it can avoid the hegemony of dominant cultural experience. Education occurs in a socio-cultural context and curriculum materials and practices reflect certain social values.

### **Defining Curriculum and Syllabus**

Although the notion of syllabus is of course not at all new in the context of education, but in fact the term of syllabus is sometimes confusing or even often interchanged carelessly with the term of curriculum. It seems that both terms are indeed among the terms or concepts that the most frequently discussed and misunderstood by some students teachers, and lecturers, in language teaching and learning world. It is, therefore, to reduce the confusion and even to avoid this to happen, different definitions of these two terms need discussing.

Generally speaking, curriculum involves planning what is to be taught or learned, implementing it and evaluating it. According to Richards (2001: 2), curriculum refers to all learning experiences that a person encounters at school, including those aspects which influence them only subconsciously (Littlewood, 1991:11). For Yalden (1985:18) the term of curriculum includes the goals, objectives, contents, process,

resources, and means of evaluation of all the learning experiences planned for pupils both in and out of the school and community through classroom instruction and related programs. Similar elements of curriculum are also apparent when Richard, et al, describe the curriculum as an educational program which states: a) the educational purposes of the program (the Ends); b) the content, teaching procedures and learning experiences which will be necessary to achieve this purpose (the Means); and c) some means for assessing whether or not the educational ends have been achieved (Richard, Platt, and Platt, 1992:94). Even Allen's explanation (in Littlewood, 1991:12) give a clearer understanding for us about what curriculum is when he suggests that the curriculum designer should consider the following six levels of curriculum design. They are: a) concept formation (general principles of language learning); b) administrative decision making (which includes the formulation of general aims); c) syllabus planning (the stage at which specific objectives are defined); d) material design (including texts, exercises and so on); e) classroom activity (where materials are adapted by individual teachers to their own situation; and f) evaluation (which tests the validity of the decision made at earlier stages).

The term '*syllabus*' has a range of meanings. In the 'narrow' sense (Nunan 1988), it means the specification of the content of a course and the order in which that content will be taught. In language teaching, in the broad sense, it has come to mean a specific way to conceptualize what language is and how language is learned so that materials can be selected or prepared for the classroom. According to Penny Ur, in *A Course in Language Teaching*, it is a document which consists, essentially, of a list. This list which specifies all the things that are to be taught in the course for the syllabus is designed (Ur, 1996:176). To clarify what Ur means by the list, Nunan's definition is perhaps worth quoting. He says that syllabus is "a specification of what is to be taught in a language program and the order in which it is to be taught (Nunan, 1993 : 159). In a similar way syllabus is defined by Richard et al, that it is a description of the contents of a course of instruction and the order in which they are to be taught (Richard, Platt, and Platt, 1992:368). Meanwhile syllabus is actually more than merely a list or description, it is a plan of work to be taught in a particular course (Robinson, 1991:33-34). In the words of Yalden "a syllabus has been compared to a blue print: it is a plan which the teacher converts into a reality of classroom interaction" (1985:19).

Based on the above mentioned definitions and descriptions of both curriculum and syllabus, it is clear that curriculum is different from syllabus. While curriculum deals with broader aspect of teaching and learning, syllabus is limited to more or less a plan that should be kept as a guide by a teacher or lecturer when he is doing his job, teaching English. It is a blueprint and, at the same time, a flexible guide to follow and to manipulate smartly. In syllabus, design concerns the selection of items to be learnt and the grading of those items into an appropriate sequence, curriculum design, however, is not just concerned with the list of what will be taught and in what order, but it also deals with the planning, implementation, evaluation, management, and administration of education program (Harmer, 2004:295). In other words, syllabus is actually a statement of the plan for any part of the curriculum. The syllabus should, therefore, be viewed in the context of on going curriculum development process.

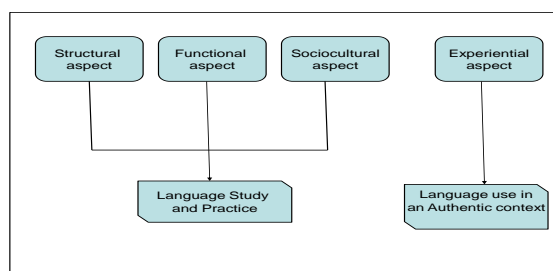
### **Types of Syllabus Design**

As an ongoing curriculum development process, syllabus usually has at least seven characteristics (Ur, 1996: 177). They are: 1) It consists of comprehensive list of :

content items and process items; about this Nunan is of the opinion that a syllabus may contain all or any of the following : phonology, grammar, functions, notions, topics, themes, and tasks” (Nunan,1993 : 159); 2). It is ordered; 3). has explicit objectives; 4). It is a public document; 5). It may indicate a time schedule; 6). It may indicate a preferred methodology or approach; and 7). It may recommends materials.

In addition to the characteristics of syllabus, literatures on ELT also touch upon different types of syllabus employed in the English language teaching and learning practices. Among those types of syllabus which types are considered to be the most beneficial syllabus and which are not should be kept in mind. Before deciding which one or ones most suitable, therefore, a close look at the types of syllabus design offered should be undertaken. Harmer (2004:296-299), for instance, explains seven types of syllabus: grammar syllabus, lexical syllabus, functional syllabus, situational syllabus, topic-based syllabus, task-based syllabus, and multi syllabus. Penny Ur offers (1996:178-179) no less than 10 main types of syllabus prevailing in both ELT and ESP. They are grammatical syllabus, lexical syllabus, grammatical-lexical syllabus, situational syllabus, topic-based syllabus, notional syllabus, functional-notional syllabus, mixed or multi-strand syllabus, procedural, and process syllabus. In *ESP Today*, Robinson provide the three broad types of syllabus as follows: content based syllabus, skill-based syllabus, and method-based syllabus.

In *Multi-dimension syllabus*, Stern (1981) mentions the three aspects as follows: structural, functional, socio-cultural and experiential. To get more clear-understanding of this type of syllabus, they should be described briefly as follows: Multi-dimensional Syllabus, in a *communicative syllabus*, the objective of teaching a foreign language is developing learners' communicative competence. As communicative competence consists of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence, the syllabus is necessarily multidimensional. In the early 1980s, there were proposals to add functional aspect, socio-cultural aspect and experiential aspect to the syllabus. Stern (1981) put forward a fourfold model as shown below:



Picture 1: Multidimensional Syllabus (Adapted from Stern, 1981)

### **Multicultural in Designing English Curriculum for Islamic Studies**

Having touched upon the meaning and types of syllabus in ELT and ESP, it is worth discussing briefly about Islamic institution. In Indonesian context, Islamic institution or studies are special religious disciplines and sub-disciplines offered at The State Islamic University, The State Institute for Islamic Studies, the State College for Islamic Studies, and the faculty of Islamic studies at general or secular universities supervised under the Department of Religious Affairs. Based the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) decree No. 110 year 1982, and approved by LIPI, Islamic studies consist of 8 subfield-disciplines : Qur'an and Hadith; Islamic Thought, Islamic Law and

Social Structure, Islamic History and Civilization, Arabic Language and Literature, Islamic education, Islamic preaching, and Modern Thought in Modern Muslim World. This 8 subfield-disciplines at Islamic Institution, later on based on the MORA decree No 27 Year 1995, are developed further up to 16 sub-disciplines offered at five faculties: faculty of letters, faculty of propagation, faculty of theology, faculty of law faculty of (see, Bisri, 1997:3-4).

Along with the gathering momentum of inclusion of multicultural in language teaching across the world, an initiative has been started in Islamic higher institution where linguists and social activists are advocating for inclusion of multicultural context and culture, namely, ethnic languages in mainstream education. Alongside with this initiative there are many linguists and teachers of English language who are advocating for inclusion of multicultural in English Language Teaching for Islamic studies.

The problem that the Islamic higher institution is facing how to bring about the implementation of such content and context in English language. Looking at the course books and educational materials, it is evident that the English teaching is heavily influenced by the culture of target language users. Although some content and stories seem that they have multicultural context, but the exercises that follow again reflect to the target language culture. On the other hand, the teachers are also imparted trainings and education aligning with the target language culture. In this ambience, it will be difficult to implement inclusive multicultural content and culture while teaching of English. In order to overcome this impasse, some measures can be taken so that there is a momentum towards progressive implementation of the discussed issue.

First, the language policy makers and the educators of the country need to come together to make a master plan on how to develop materials, train teachers and set objectives on inclusion of multicultural culture in EIS. Only when a concrete set of objectives and a clear vision of the implementation procedures have been codified, the initiative can move forward. Second, there has to be a mass drive for collection of multicultural content in the form of stories, poems, articles and the like which also reflects multicultural culture. The content corpus has to be exhaustive so that all the major aspects that need to be covered are covered. It is wise to include people from different academic, professional, age group, ethnic, gender, and geographical backgrounds to make the corpus comprehensive and complete.

Third, the gathered content has to be carefully cataloged, edited and selected for practical use. There may be many ways by which the content can be used. The content can be an integrated one where a little of everything is included, or it might also be ethnic or locality specific where different communities make use of different relevant parts of the corpus. The fourth, which might also be the most important, is to enable the teacher of English to believe that multicultural content and context is not only necessary but is the most effective way of teaching or learning a language.

The teacher should also have autonomy to develop content from her own locality adjusting to the need of the learners there. Perhaps the most difficult part of this endeavor will be to discard the prevalent target culture based content in favor of multicultural culture based one. But once the importance is felt and the initiative

commenced, language learning process will take a meaningful and applicable turn. The learners then will not be learning English in vacuum but they can associate their own life experiences to the language being learnt. Finally, a monitoring and evaluation mechanism should be developed in order to judge how successful the implementation of the initiative has been. The monitoring and evaluating body can also make necessary changes in the whole process as the problems arise.

### **Alternative of Syllabus and Material Design**

ESP course design is claimed as the product of a dynamic interaction between a number of elements : the results of the need analysis, the source designer’s approach to syllabus and methodology, and existing materials (Robinson, 1991:34). Similarly, the alternative syllabus design in teaching EIS, which is later on reflected and materialized in the form of material design and presently used as EIS textbook at IAIN ‘Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin’ Banten, also evolved from such kind of the need analysis conducted directly or indirectly by the contributors of the textbook. The textbook, entitled *Special Readers : English for Islamic Studies (SREIS)*, has been tried at all its stages, as far as possible, to follow ‘something like’ Multi-dimension design principles. For instance, all the basic four English skill such as listening, reading, speaking and writing as well as grammatical review and vocabulary building are integrated in single unit presentation. In addition, communicative approach, as a general teaching methodology to follow in Indonesia, is also taken into account, that is by presenting almost unedited and adapted authentic reading materials quoted from different sources on Islam written in English. This is line with one of ESP experts’ opinion when he states that “a key concept within the communicative approach, and one felt to be particularly relevant for ESP, is that of authenticity (Robinson,1991:54). Other element which also influences both syllabus and material design for SREIS is the ‘existing materials’. The existing materials, especially those of reading passages, are designed not for teaching English purposes. The materials are texts on Islam and Multiculturalism and its related disciplines written by experts that should be carefully read and selected before their inclusion in the textbook. Table below will clarify the description of syllabus and material design of the English for Islamic Studies at IAIN SMH Banten.

TABLE : EIS Syllabus

THE SYLLABUS OF ENGLISH FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES	
<b>A. Course Profile</b>	
Program	: Undergraduate (Strata 1)
Subject	: English-1
Department	: Islamic Primary Education
Faculty	: Education and Teacher Training
Credit	: 2 Credit Units
Curr. Element Code	: General Stipulated Basic Courses ( <i>Mata Kuliah Dasar Umum</i> )
Subject Description	: English is designed in such a simple way so as to provide the students important tools for communication, especially in English as Foreign Language Teaching and Learning.



Competency Standard: Students are able to use English in different situations for different communicative purposes, and to read the textbooks and articles on Islam written in English.

Basic Competencies : Basic competencies demanded by respective course contents will be provided in detail in what so called separated Lesson Plan or *Satuan Acara Perkuliahan* (SAP).

Indicators : Indicators of mastering every aspect , cognitive, affective as well as psychomotoric domains, of the course content are also will be explained in detail in the separated relevant lesson plan (SAP).

## **B. Course Contents**

- Meet 1 : The Qur'an and the Prophet
- Meet 2 : The Muslim World Today
- Meet 3 : The Responsibility of *Ummah*
- Meet 4 : The Five Pillars of Islam
- Meet 5 : Islam and Multicultural Society
- Meet 6 : The Religious Stimulus to Learning in Banten
- Meet 7 : Education in Medieval Islam in Banten
- Meet 8 : The Relation Between Education and Leadership
- Meet 9 : Islam and Education Reforms
- Meet10 : Islam and Multicultural
- Meet 11 : The Groundwork of Islamic Civilization
- Meet 12 : Islamic Civilization in Banten
- Meet 13 : An Islamic language
- Meet 14 : Some Remarks on Indonesia
- Meet 15 : Religion and Change

## **C. Evaluation....**

(Adapted from : Makmur, 2011)

## **Concluding Remarks**

The success or the failure of any teaching English as a foreign language in the context of integrating multicultural specifically English for Islamic Institution, is influenced by many factors. One of the important factors is the availability of the appropriate syllabus and material designs. As culture must be taught in conjunction with language, and not as an adjunct. Materials which are produced must enable the learner to gain exposure to selected reading in English and authentic data from real time interaction.

This article has assumed certain developments in English language based on current global trends. It has assumed that English is fast becoming a global language

and it will become more so in the future. Considering these base assumptions, the article has provided insight into understanding the importance of English language and equal importance of using multicultural while teaching English. In conclusion, we can reaffirm the essence of the whole discussion in the following manner: first, we need to understand that we use English as a method of communication and this language is fast becoming a global language. Because we use it in our communication, the language cannot be excluded from culture because they are what we are likely to be communicating about. There may be differences in opinions regarding how or if multicultural should be used in teaching English, but it is essential that we integrate multicultural aspects.

Second, use of multicultural in teaching English will depend on the nature of the multicultural setting. Some system may not be applicable in all communities. Therefore, how the integration is to be done should be tailored to suit the needs of a particular community or a country. In case of IHI, this can initiate with development of content corpus based on multilingual communities existing in the country and making a broad plan on what and how to integrate the content thus collected and selected. Third, the use of multicultural can be done following a procedural format where multicultural can be given more priority in the earlier stages of learning English language.

What have been done so far, indeed, constitute partial efforts to meet such an urgent need. Although, the present writer has also tried to prepare alternative syllabus design for EIS, as presented above, it is of course still far from being perfect. Multicultural has the potential to equip students with skills needed to interact with others from different faiths, ethnicities, races, cultures. But without a deeper and sound understanding of it and political commitment to support its implementation, we are just trivializing its goal -- the transformation of society via education. A more comprehensive study covering all the existing textbooks of EIS in Indonesia should, therefore, be carried out. As teaching-learning process still depend mainly on textbooks, educations should therefore ensure that books or teaching materials they use in their classrooms be culturally sensitive and respect student's varied socio-cultural background, which affect their learning. Final remarks, learning of the multicultural and context of the target language is to be achieved for more comprehensive understanding. When integration is done among various communities and language groups, then English will emerge as a true global language with global ownership.

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