

PROCEEDINGS

THE 1ST NATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON ELT AND CULTURE

REVITALIZING THE PRACTICE
OF TEACHING ENGLISH
TO YOUNG LEARNERS
IN INDONESIA
(TEYLIN)

Muria Kudus University (UMK), Kudus
July 19, 2011

ENGLISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION FACULTY
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Revitalizing the Practice of Teaching English to Young Learners in Indonesia (TEYLIN)

Layouters

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PREFACE

The dynamic world life and the strategic roles of teaching English, especially to young learners, always encourage a greater need to revitalize the practice of teaching English to Young Learners in Indonesia (TEYLIN). In response to the need, the Committee of 1st National Conference on ELT and Culture at UMK has called for presentation and workshop proposals of the conference to be held in the campus of English Education Department, Muria Kudus University (UMK) in Kudus Central Java. The conference is conducted on July 19, 2011.

The presentation includes theoretical and/or empirical (research-based) papers of TEYLIN. Workshops are also welcome. English is the official language for the presentations and submissions of the conference. This proceeding is published to preserve all the papers presented in the conference. The plenary and parallel session speakers present their views on emerging issues related to the Teaching English to Young Learners in Indonesia (TEYLIN)

The topics of the conference include the TEYLIN-related areas such as (1) Current Development and Implementation, (2) Policy, Syllabus, and Material Development, 3) Cultural and Linguistic Insights, (4) ICT, Games, Media, Methods, and Assessment/Evaluation for Practices, (5) Local Literature and (6) Psycholinguistic and Sociolinguistic Aspects.

The committee extends sincere and deepest gratitude to all contributors who are the presenters in plenary and parallel sessions of the conference. Because of time constraints and other technical matters, the committee has realized that there are several weaknesses in the publication of this proceeding. Hopefully, this publication of TEYLIN will present some theoretical, empirical and practical significance. Thank you.

Kudus: July 19, 2011
The Chairman of the Committee
Drs. Muh. Syafei, M.Pd

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Theoretical Considerations for Establishing Multilingual Mind and the Implications for teaching English to young learners

by Margana

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Abstract: Nowadays, the establishment of multilingual mind on young learners has become controversial issues among scholars. Some of them claim that establishing multilingual mind of elementary school students endangers the development of their first language because their first language has not established yet. In terms of the academic achievement, some studies also reveal that students who have multilingual mind do not perform different achievement compared to those students who have monolingual mind (Danoff et al, 1978). This implies that the policy of bilingual education which is widely carried out in elementary school level should be reformulated. Nation (in Margana, 2005) states that the establishment of multilingual mind is believed by some scholars to only block the language development of their first language. The above statements are countered by other scholars who claim that multi-linguals have different ways in processing different languages (Goh and Elaine, 2004, de Bot, 2005: 39). Saunders (1982) states that multi-linguals have separate memory stores which enable them to keep two or more languages without blocking one another. She further says that multi-linguals have completely different sets of concept in their minds which make them superior in terms of their language development in their first language and target language. Another study reveals that having multilingual mind is believed to develop students' language and literacy proficiency which lead to triggering the success of gaining academic achievement and socio-cultural integration - the ability to serve in the larger society and in the heritage community (Brisk, 1998). In reference to the mentioned issue, this paper deals with a theoretical review of establishing children to have multilingual mind followed by conferring practical implications for teaching English to young learners.

Key words: *Monolingual, Multilingual mind, Acquisition*

A. Introduction

The issue of raising multilingual mind in early time, for example, in kindergarten or elementary school level, has been becoming a hot debate among scholars. Some of them claim that such an activity endangers the development of their first language because their first language has not established yet (Nation in Margana, 2005). To some extent, the young learners get confused of the existence of the two or languages, namely mother tongue (local languages, first language, and target language. This makes young learners difficult to acquire what language should be gained first.

Such statements need to be empirically justified as bilingual children have 'two completely different sets of concepts in their minds' (Goh and Elaine, 2004). In addition, a great number of studies reveal that having bilingual minds confer many advantages which facilitate young learners to deal with meta-cognitive and cognitive development Saunders (1988). Also, it can assist young learners to gain maximal language development on the target language on the grounds that they have been familiar with their first language which, to some extent, provide a positive influence on their second language development.

In reference to the controversial issue, this paper deals with establishing multilingual mind to propose theoretical impacts on the effort of establishing multi-lingual minds. To achieve such an objective, this paper discusses three main issues which include the notion of bilingualism, theoretical

issues on establishing the multilingual minds, and the pedagogical implication for teaching English to young learners. Each is presented below.

B. The Notion of Bilingual Mind

Many scholars have attempted to clearly define the term bilingual or multilingual. It refers to being familiar or mastering two languages used at home and/or at school (Goh and Elaine, 2004:49). Such a definition suggests that when someone actively uses two languages, for example, first language (Indonesian) and target language (English), he/she is called a bilingual. The term *bilingual* by some scholars can be used to refer to someone who activates more than two languages. This means that bilingualism is not only concerned with two languages utilized, but it can cope with two or more languages being activated. Hammers and Blanc (2000) clearly states that bilingualism may refer to a society or individual who has access to more than one linguistic code as a means of social contact or interaction.

However, some scholars argue that it is not easy to determine the indicators of bilingualism. Is someone called a bilingual when he/she only knows enough English lexical items but one does not hold social conversation with the use of English? This is a difficult question to answer. The answer of such a question depends on what perspective a person holds. For example, Goh and Elaine (2004) do not call him/her as a bilingual as he/she does not perform equally or highly proficiency in both languages (Indonesian and English). This relies on the definition presented Bloomfield in Saunders (1982) who claims that bilingualism means a native-like control of two languages. It means that a person is called a bilingual when he/she can control the activated languages equally like a dually monolingual. This is argued by Morris in Saunders 1982 who states that it is very difficult to find an individual who is able to activate two languages interchangeably. There will be one of the activated languages which is more dominant than the other language (Margana, 2005). Added to this, it needs a strong effort to judge someone to stop being a second language learner and become a proficient bilingual (Saunders, 1982).

In relation to the above issue, the term *bilingualism* in this paper is loosely defined. It refers to having two or more languages Saunders (1982). Therefore, a bilingual can refer to a true or balance bilingual and an imbalance bilingual embodying a second language learner who is struggling to learn and acquire the target language including young learners who are in the process of learning the target language. In reference to this, bilingualism can be classified according to the degree of being a bilingual, namely the balanced bilingual and imbalanced-bilingual. The former means a person who is able to control the two languages equally. The latter refers to a person who activates a dominant language accompanied by a less dominant language.

With regard to the second type, Cummins in Romaine (1995:261) uses the term *semi-lingualism* to refer to the imbalanced bilingualism. It is defined as having 'less than native-like skills in both languages with detrimental cognitive and academic consequences'. More comprehensively, Hansegard in Romaine (1995) offers six linguistic deficits as the indicators of being semi-linguals. They include (1) size of repertoire of words, phrases actively utilized in speech, (2) lack of linguistic correctness, (3) less degree of automatism, (4) inability of producing meaningful language, (5) lack of the mastery of the cognitive, emotive, and volitional function of language, and (6) poorness in individual meanings.

In reference to the above discussion, it is clear enough that the term *bilingualism* can be the idealized bilingualism characterized with full competence in two or more activated languages and not idealized bilingualism with 'native-like' level in one of the activated languages or low level in both languages. In reference to this, young learners, for example, students of elementary school and junior high school levels in Indonesia are categorized as bilinguals because they have more than one language one of which is the target language being learned (Margana, 2005). In terms of the degree of bilingualism, they are categorized as imbalanced bilinguals as their first language is more dominantly used than the target language.

C. Theoretical Overview of having multi-lingual mind

Establishing multi-lingual mind on the part of young learners becomes much controversy by scholars. Some of them question whether it can be considered an advantage or disadvantage (Saunders, 1982:14). The debate for and against establishing bilingualism can be a meaningful consideration for promoting or not promoting the establishment of bilingualism. In relation to this issue, the following reviews theoretical issues as performed by many scholars.

Jespersen in Romaine (1995) claims that the establishment of bilingualism for young learners has to be reformulated as it provides them with more disadvantages rather than advantages. He further says that 'children hardly learn either of the languages as completely as possible if they do not focus on one language. Establishing two languages on part of children diminishes their power of learning other things as their brains require serious efforts to do so. Nation (in Margana, 2005) states the establishment of multilingual mind is believed by some scholars to only block the language development of their first language. Schuchardt in Saunders (1982:) remarks that if a person has 'two strings to his bow, both are rather slack'. Reynold in Saunders (1982:15) strongly claims that having bilingual mind leads to language mixing and confusion which in turn affects 'the reduction in the ability to think and act precisely, a decrease in intelligence, an increase in mental lethargy and a decrease of self-discipline'. Omark in Romaine (1995:109) also urges that bilingual children are prone to stuttering which is caused by syntactic overload imposed when they process and produce two languages (see Karniol in Romaine, 1995:109). In short, bilingualism creates negative effects on intellectual development.

The negative effect on having bilingual mind is supported by the result of the study conducted by Saer in Saunders (1982:15) involving 1400 children which performs that bilingual children have lower intelligence compared than monolingual children who lived in rural districts and that there is a slight difference between monolingual children and bilingual children in terms of their intelligence of the urban district. In short, mono-lingualism and bilingualism do not perform any difference in terms of the intelligence.

The above argument is countered by Haugen in Saunders (1982:16) who claims that having two languages does not give an effect on non-verbal intelligence. Scott in Romaine (1995:113) argues that bilingual children are better than monolinguals when they are involved in divergent thinking task as an index of creativity. Divergent thinking, according to Lambert in Romaine (1995:113) refers to 'a distinctive cognitive style reflecting a rich imagination and an ability to rapidly scan a host of possible solutions'. This is also supported by Carringer in Romaine (1995:113) who states that bilingualism promotes creative thinking. In addition, the bilingual children have great cognitive flexibility enabling them to distinguish between form and content because they have two terms for one referent. Liedtke and Nelson in Romaine (1995) state that bilingual children perform better concept formation which becomes a primary part of intellectual development because they often expose to a more complex environment and a greater amount of social interactions compared to mono-lingual children.

Some scholars claim that multi-linguals have different ways in processing different languages (de Bot et al., 2005: 39). Saunders (1982) states that multi-linguals have separate memory stores which enable them to keep two or more languages without blocking one another. Also, multi-linguals have completely different sets of concept in their minds which make them superior in terms of their language development in their first language and target language. Having multilingual mind is believed to develop students' language and literacy proficiency which lead to triggering the success of gaining academic achievement and socio-cultural integration - the ability to serve in the larger society and in the heritage community (Brisk, 1998).

Bialystock (1991) conducted a series of studies dealing with bilingualism. The results of her study show that bilingual children are more advanced than mono-lingual ones in specific uses of language utilized in particular types of problems. For instance, when the bilingual children are involved in doing some tasks such as separating out individual words from meaningful sentences, focusing on only the form or meaning of a word under highly distracting conditions, and reassigning a familiar name to a different

object, bilingual children are notably more superior than monolingual children because they have high levels of selective attention which plays an important role in processing cognitive performance.

The most prominent counter to the negative effect on bilingual mind is presented by Peal and Lambert in Romaine (1995:112) and Saunders (1982:16). According to them, having bilingual or multilingual mind performs better than monolingual mind on both verbal and non-verbal intelligence. The following presents their remarks.

‘Intellectually the bilingual’s experience with two language systems seems to have left him with a mental flexibility, a superiority in concept formation, and more diversified set of mental abilities, in the sense that the pattern of abilities developed by bilinguals was more heterogeneous. It is not possible to state from the present study whether the more intelligent child became bilingual or whether bilingualism aided his intellectual development, but there is no question about the fact that he is superior intellectually. In contrast, the monolingual appears to have a more unitary structure of intelligence, which he must use for all types of intellectual tasks’.

In reference to the above remarks, it can be inferred that having multilingual mind leads bilingual children to being superior in terms of their intellectual development. Myers (2008:26-27) states that having multilingual mind facilitates bilingual children to improve creative thinking and a complete meta-linguistic awareness leading to a deeper understanding of the uses of languages. The following presents some cognitive advantages of having multilingual minds. They include (1) earlier and greater awareness of the arbitrariness of language, (2) earlier separation of meaning from sound, (3) greater adeptness at evaluating non-empirical contradictory statements, (4) greater adeptness at divergent thinking, (5) greater adeptness at creative thinking, (6) greater linguistic and cognitive creativity, and (7) greater facility at concept formation. This comes to the conclusion that establishing multilingual mind on part of young learners confers more advantages than disadvantages. Therefore, raising multilingual mind has to be conducted.

D. Pedagogical Implication for raising multi-lingual mind

It is obvious that there are no convincing reasons that establishing multilingual mind deprives the linguistic and intellectual development on part of young learners. Conversely, the establishment of multilingual mind in the early age confers positive impacts on meta-cognitive and cognitive development.

The belief that second language can hamper the acquisition of the first language seems to be a misleading conclusion as bilingual children have different space to deal with storing each language in their own brains (Goh and Elaine, 2005). In support of this claim, Grosjean (2001: 179-780) states that the first language and target language can be conducted simultaneously in the early age without depriving each other. This implies that in early age children may be given a lot of exposures to the target language in order that they can gain the language development maximally, particularly in the critical period in which the children are able to acquire a native accent and are capable of storing the target language data easily (Singleton in Ellis, 2004). This can be inferred that establishing multilingual mind through both formal instruction and non-formal instruction in the early age confers more advantages than disadvantages.

With regard to the above issue, the establishment of multilingual mind has to be disseminated and strenuously conducted by many parties involved including policy-makers, parents, and English teachers not English teachers, and the like. This brings some consequences for English teachers who are involved in teaching English for young learners to well prepare in order to establish multilingual mind on them. They have to design teaching and learning activities and teaching kits which facilitate young learners to develop their multi-lingual mind. This can be gained with the use of the mother tongue, the first language and the target language as a means of classroom interactions depending on their students’ characteristics. Of the three languages activated, use of English should be taken into account as it is

believed to successfully gain the language development and language awareness.

In selecting the materials, English teachers are encouraged to be selective in the sense that the materials have to be contextual and meaningful in order to facilitate them to gain a deep understanding of the presented materials leading to easily acquire the target language being learned. To do so, English teachers should give an emphasis on how language works in context and how lexical items relate one another according to their domains. Added to this, the techniques used in the English language teaching and learning for young learners should accommodate and drive learners to conduct various interactions with the use of two languages as this is believed to maximally acquire the target language.

It is obvious that English teachers are believed to be model for young learners when they are engaged in classroom activities. This implies that English teachers who teach young learners have to perform good English in order to provide appropriate and acceptable English language uses as the exposures of the target language to young learners. Therefore, establishing multilingual in the early age requires qualified English teachers who have high English proficiency and who have excellent skills and knowledge how to teach young learners as this influences the success of developing the multilingual mind.

To prepare the qualified English teachers, it is urgent that private universities and state universities have to offer some lectures which deal with teaching English for young learners and intensely provide a comprehensive English training for English teachers who teach in the elementary school level whose backgrounds are not English education department. If it is possible, the ministry of national education via universities or institutions offers a study program which specializes in teaching English for young learners.

Establishing multilingual mind should not only rely on formal institutions. This means that parents and society have to actively involved in facilitating young learners to develop their multilingual mind. The parents should be positively and actively involved in establishing their children to be bilinguals through giving psychological and financial support to their children. If it is possible, the parents and family members may create bilingual environment in their own home. Society members should not be skeptic when young learners use English outside of the classroom. They should have positive behaviours dealing with the use of English in social interactions.

E. Final Remarks

As described earlier, there is no satisfactory evidence that establishing multilingual mind deprives young learners' intelligence. There is also no convincing evidence that establishing multilingual mind in the early age distracts the acquisition of the first language. Conversely, a great number of studies conducted by scholars provide the convincing theoretical reviews that the establishment of the multilingual mind in the early age confers a great number of advantages in terms of language development, meta-linguistic, and cognitive control. Added to this, the bilingual children perform a better acquisition on the target language as they have got skills and knowledge of their first language acquisition. This suggests that English teachers and other parties are encouraged to go hand in hand to establish multi-lingual minds as it promises young learners to be strong in cognitive or intellectual development in particular.

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