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Learning Environment Construction in Islamic Higher Education: Connecting the Puzzles of Ideas

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Abstract: This study aimed at analyzing the learning environment construction in Islamic higher education in Indonesia. It seems that this study realized that the concepts of social studies, culture and learning theories are key factors of learning a foreign language undoubtedly. A qualitative descriptive method was utilized in this research to collect the data through observation, interviews and library research. However, this paper only tried to share the data mostly from the library research due to its limitation. As a result this study believed that; socio-cultural factors, intercultural communicative competence, Whorfian hypothesis and learning environment as a learning media are the missing puzzles of the important elements to support nowadays language learning in Islamic higher institutions, especially in eastern Indonesia. This study tried to connecting these puzzles of the idea in order, to give some views for helping the institutions re-designing or constructing their learning environment to support language learning process. Beyond its limitations, this study sees an effective teaching and learning of social studies should bring about development not only to the individual learner but to the society in which such an individual lives and operates. This study realized also that learning in an individual is somehow a complex phenomenon and it's depending on a multitude of factors. In the end, this study recommended that Islamic higher institutions should start to see the school as a social system in implementing a multicultural education so it cannot be overemphasized and their duty is to create and sustain an effective multicultural school environment.

Keywords: Learning Environment, Islamic Higher Education

1. Introduction

Nobody doubts that education is the best and effective way of saving the country through developing wise generation with their good attitude. Therefore, the changing paradigm and reform of habits in many aspects should be put in mind in every educational institution especially in Islamic higher education in order to educate the millennia onto becomes a wise and well behave generation as well as to respond the societies' need and expectation in a global competition.

One of the supports that may be embodied in a series of teaching the millennial is the environment construction. With environmental factors, the ambiance and atmosphere of learning process especially in learning a foreign language can be realized. Without it, learning the foreign language will never be effective. Learning new language should be in *real life look alike* itself or in another word there will be no language that evolved without the existence of an environment that supports it.

Yusuf A. M. (1982) expressed a view that education is a process by which a person is affected by the selected and controlled environment (e.g. campus) so that he can develop himself personally at its optimum and competent in community life (social). Interactions within the individual and the surrounding community can be seen both in terms of intelligence or ability, interests, and experiences. In that environment, the students gained interactions so there is always an opportunity to modify the



innate potential and also learning that takes place in the classroom. When learning takes place, the ability to mimic and adapt the defaults which have already been owned by every student since birth. The awareness of social development sourced from him and coupled with the encounter with other individuals. To get results as expected, then the school environment may be modified to become a means of support for the implementation of the learning process which is very limited in the classroom. Even with the school environment, it will also be part of the learning process. So that learning is not only restricted by hours of study but even the chance to practice getting the frequency that exceeds the existing school hours. Given this opportunity, there will be the enrichment in development. The environment would encourage their emotions and perceptions, both of which cannot be developed only with the subject matter within two hours.

In the old time Islamic higher education only concerns on native language, national language, and of course Arabic language but nowadays, the time was changing the needs of the global competition put Islamic higher institutions to starts seeing more new languages, especially English as the language most worldwide spoken. Therefore, in the past couple years many Islamic higher institution in Indonesia being aware of it and start reforming their institutions by creating or construction Learning Environment to support it. However, in some institutions the gap between *old* and *new* language is quite different Like for example, hen studying Arabic, the interaction can be constructed simultaneously with the intensifying a cause for the birth of a productive interaction compare to when the students learn English, some of the meetings being less productive due to the many factors that influence it including environment that is not so supporting, or too many language barriers.

Therefore, this study feels important to share a thought on how to see and overcome this, based on what this study had done and found during the series of data collection in some parts of eastern Indonesia where some of Islamic higher education starts to reform their institutions by constructing the language learning environment. There are several factors and theories that needs to put in minds when the institutions need to enhance their educational paradigm such as:

1.1 Socio-Cultural Factors

Students' motivations and attitudes towards the learning of foreign languages are often influenced by the broader socio-cultural context. Many studies have been carried out on cultural variables such as that promotes the teaching and learning of socio-cultural factor that inhibits it Richards, J. C. (1972), Alfred, M. V. (2002). These study somehow similar in a thought that socio-cultural factors are important key that needs to underlined due to its importance in the teaching and learning process. This is an emerging theory in psychology that looks at the important contributions that society makes to individual development. The theory proposed by a psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978) by stresses the interaction between developing people and the culture in which they live. The theory believed that parents, caregivers, peers and the culture at large were responsible for the development of higher-order functions. This theory focuses on how adult and peers influence individual learning and also how cultural beliefs and attitudes affect instruction and learning.

The theory recommends many good things, one of it was, dynamically make some *content integration* in teaching materials. This deals with the extent to which lecturers use examples and content from a variety of cultures in their teaching for example. When the electronic cinema and the film production of Korea and Japan struck, then the interest to learn Korean and Japanese began to emerge. Previously, the translation of Japanese comics which is conducted by the publishing industry gives effect to the mastery of terms in the context of Japan's comics. This means interaction and encounter with the culture used as language lessons will be better if it is incorporated in social and cultural conditions as one of the supporters. By getting the information in the form of non-formal language, this will leave interest compared with the rigid language classes.

Moreover, *natural consciousness* will respond with interest for the pleasure aspect. Building pleasure in language learning is necessary to serve as socio-cultural formations. At the moment there is no concern as a group, and then the perception of an individual is not going to wake up in giving an idea of reason with consciousness. Further, *Encouragement* (drive) is part of the instinct which is present in every human gene. By giving a touch to turn on the willingness will be part of the motivation for language learning. The urge to imitate each other's behavior is a source for socio-cultural development. This impulse is precisely what would impose conformance with the people in the neighborhood. This condition can be underlined in order to enhance the language mastery of students, especially from Islamic higher education or university.

Social studies learning experiences and activities should mirror social realities due to the changing nature of society and the socio-cultural institutions therein. When Islam is accepted in Indonesia, Arabic language became a major part of the spread of Islam. Specifically Malay responded by making the Arabic script adapted into Malay who then called the Jawi script. The use of this script is further increased with the use of the Malay language as the lingua franca. In fact, Indonesian people then make it as the national language, called *Bahasa Indonesia*. The spread of Islam and Arabic language is no longer limited to the islands of Sumatra and Kalimantan, even continue to spread and reach to the East of Ternate and Tidore of Maluku, including Fak-fak in Papua. Indonesian vocabulary also had begun receiving extra from Arabic which becomes part of Indonesian itself. Dominantly, religious activities also make Arabic as their main language. Thus it results on the dichotomies of the Arabic language and non-Arabic. Whereas in the journey, the Arabic language is not only a religious language, is also used in the activity of scientific and technological developments. Therefore, the other *new language* such as English teaching program should see it as a reference. Nevertheless, socio-cultural practices that impede the effective teaching and learning of social studies should be discouraged.

1.2 Intercultural communicative competence

Communicative aspect, as well as intercultural aspect, are two parameters of success in second language learners process. Nowadays theories put this parameter it in one dynamic item called intercultural communicative competence (ICC). This means the ability to understand cultures, including your own, and use this understanding to communicate with people from other cultures successfully. In the classroom it means allowed the students producing a written text or online guide about their own country and culture for visitors, reading and discussing guides written by visitors from other culture (perhaps overseas), exploring aspects of a target culture in various media including movies, literature and television, or giving presentations on aspects of the target culture, and exploiting their lecturer's own expertise of their own culture.

This study thinks, ICC needs to be incorporated into the language curriculum in Islamic higher education, if the institutions hope to help students in developing an appreciation for the study of language and culture, an awareness of their own culture, and the development of skills that will allow the students being a communicators, adaptable or to be competent in language.

The design of curriculum should take into consideration on *Process Model* of Intercultural Competence, which emphasises the development of self-awareness, openness, and transformation and serves as a common denominator for various models and approaches to the development of ICC or in other words the institutions need to set a curriculum that dynamically contains: knowledge, attitudes, education, and skills to understand and learn. This ability needs for them so can learn and understand the nature of the language. Moreover, Each language carries habits for its speakers,

For example, the institutions need the knowledge of how to use the language of Arabic speakers. So it will be as part of intercultural understanding, similarly in learning English or other languages. The use of language always makes the culture as a medium and reference. As one ever mentions "*al-'alaqah Baina al-Tsaqafah wa al-lughah* that has a meaning when learning a language, it

is always associated with the culture of the language” [15]. The language disability can impact on misunderstanding or misconceptions of language use. The disability of language use can be avoided by understanding the unity between language and culture. It is not limited to Arab history but also covers the pragmatic knowledge in the use of language that is culturally acceptable. Phrases, sentences, or speech which is learned is a phrase commonly used in Arabic which becomes the target of the lesson. Sometimes, a reaction to the praise, how to eat, expression, even the meaning of a smile is different from one language to another language. It is also the basis that in the Arabic language, the traditions of Arab society is also different from other cultures in the world.

A group of words in a sentence, despite using the same word in another sentence, will provide a different view. Although it is not the only category of linguistic which influences the thinking, way of preparation will affect the meaning of the sentence. In its different forms, such as novels, speeches, editorials, sometimes give effect to act and drive the changes. Choice of words is used and the emphasis on a particular meaning make cognitive reactions that arise. Interaction in the culture and language of the mind is explicitly coded in the language. A conversation with a friend will be different from a conversation with an older person. A conversation in the classroom would be different from a cafeteria. These forms give a different perception of others and the room in relation to oneself.

Some of the things related to the discussion of color illustrate the intersection of culture and language. The language of Papuan tribes uses references about the meaning of the language in accordance with the environment. Sometimes there is a certain tribe has a vocabulary that is less than the other tribes, as well as the Madura tribe, using the same references for green and blue. Both of them are reference entity. Both of them are not distinguished. Yet in another language, blue and green have a clear difference.

1.3 Whorfian Hypothesis

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis or Whorfian hypothesis is well known as an idea beyond time for most linguists. This *idea* was concerns about the relationship between language and thought. It talks about the influence of language on non-linguistic cognition and perception; the languages that people speak rigidly determine the way they perceive and understand the world. On the more moderate proposal, linguistic relativity, habits of using language influence habits of thinking. As a result, people who speak different languages think differently in predictable ways. Moreover, Sapir and Whorf state a hypothesis that arises some pros and cons among linguists. The linguists are divided into two groups between supporting and rejecting the hypothesis. In its development, then there is a third group that cannot reject or support the position but synchronizes between the two opposite opinion. Although Sapir-Whorf may not have been right on all counts and only little empirical support for their *radical linguistic determinism*.

The fact that language plays a role in shaping our thoughts, in modifying our perception and in creating reality is irrefutable. but he was not wrong either. Therefore this study thinks that Whorfian hypothesis is might be the missing puzzle for Islamic higher institutions especially in eastern Indonesia which this study said still learning how to teach the new language(s).

1.4 Learning Environment as a Learning Media

The previous meaning of the term of *learning environment* means place and space which covers a school, a classroom, a library or others places where the students can gain knowledge or learning process takes place in physical locations. But in today’s progress on interconnecting between technology-users-world, a learning environment extended onto a virtual world which means it doesn’t have to be a place at all or systems that accommodate the unique learning needs of every student and support the positive human relationships needed for effective learning. “Learning environments should covers: structures, tools, and communities that inspire students and educators to attain the knowledge and skills the 21st-century demands of us all”.

In the 21st century learning must take place in contexts that “promote interaction and a sense of community [that] enable formal and informal learning which covers; technology, space, time, culture, and policy. Several steps can be taken are giving words or sentences of motivation to provide a boost for the maintenance of the learning atmosphere. Therefore, a medium of view (visual) which can give the impression was needed. When the impression was made repeatedly will make as a memory that does not need to be done formally. It is only because of the support environment that provides training. Furthermore, in the interaction with the teachers and also the activities are undertaken in the school environment uses one language than more used than others such as Arabic in Islamic higher institutions as an introduction. Although on some occasions, it is also necessary to translate it into Indonesian. But by making as an introduction, it will be the enrichment media vocabulary and listening skills. Repeated listening activity will be a good workout at the same time enriching the vocabulary which is not known and has been studied on previous occasions.

For example, stepping into Islamic Boarding School (sample vx-6: Roudhotul Khuffadz), Aimas (Research subject) at the same time will also get the atmosphere where the conversation took place between the students using Arabic terms. Although the new students are in the elementary stage, they have started to be skilled to use traditional terms as life environment was built using the Arabic language. Encouragement of the environment and the use of Arabic in everyday activities will be part of efforts to strengthen and mastery of language skills so that learning Arabic is not only in the form of meetings in classes or lectures in mosques. But the series of activities in the environment at the school will be activities to practice language skills. Teachers and senior students do not only run learning programs which are not rigid and monotonous in the classroom but in some occasions, students also have to learn together even though it was in the room or gather in the dining area.

While in (sample vx-8: Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri) Aimas also learned Arabic as the curriculum studied by students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Roudhotul Khuffadz, but the Arabic language is not used in a conversation outside the classroom. The difference is because the school’s atmosphere does not provide support for the use of it. The growing orientation is as a usual elementary school. This condition is formed because the school teaches other subjects, while there is no established system for mutual support. Each subject is taught only in achieving their own goals. These observations are carried out when the curriculum 2013 that uses thematic-integrative pattern has not been applied. Of course, there will be a different learning environment when using an executed integrative pattern. Since the beginning, the students will try to achieve a common goal in various subjects.

The environment would modify the innate potential and it will happen along people’s development. So it takes an effort to get an environment that supports teaching and learning process. The ability to mimic is a process that is obtained naturally. Only if these factors were not given attention, then it will not experience significant growth. By leveraging the human ability to imitate, then learning is actually an imitating process of what is communicated by other individuals. Some varieties of children’s development can occur because of two things: heredity and formation of social environment surrounding. Nevertheless, during the data collection, this study realized that learning environment as a learning media can give a contribution such as:

First, it helps self-awareness. It deals with the maturation of the nervous system. Self-consciousness that emerges from each individual when coupled with the same factor of awareness of others will shape social life. When a student is not able to build interaction, tend to play by himself that occurs frequently, and contact with other friends is not increased, then this is a sign of lack of power. For that, the learning environment should provide an opportunity for the growth of self-awareness along with the self-awareness of other students.

The second is the social reference. When there are contact and communication with other people, then there will be a facial expression that would arise. Skills to understand facial expressions are trained talent since only pupil interaction with his mother. So, when in an environment

increasingly widespread, the facial expression which is used as a reference will be growing continuously over time. It is no longer limited to just a reference to her mother along with people who were Inside the house but also started to include teachers and classmates.

The third is the critical period. The sensitivity of the environmental effects will be growing. Under these conditions, the positive development should be more than the negative effects. This critical period will have an impact for a long time as well as determine the initial perception of how pupils to determine their sensitivity to the problems that come from the environment in the future someday. When that appearing is a negative influence, it will give out negative stimulation. Thus, realizing this critical phase, teachers need to develop learning in the form of a positive sensitivity that helps students to develop a positive attitude as well.

The fourth is primary care. During the first year of life, emotional and physical relationships will be formed that come from parenting. From the environment he faces, he will get primary care as well as how to serve the environment. The last is enrichment under development. The environment will become the stimulator of emotional, physical, perceptual, and intellectual of students. This is as when stepping the age of 5, a child will touch what he saw. It does not matter as long as he touches what is not dangerous for him.

2. Conclusions

This paper examined the concepts of social studies, culture and learning theories, during of this study collecting its data. Therefore, this study believed that; socio-cultural factors, intercultural communicative competence, Whorfian hypothesis and learning environment as a learning media are the missing puzzles of the important elements to support nowadays language learning in Islamic higher institutions. In this conclusions sections this study connecting these puzzles of ideas that needs to be underlined, to give some views for helping the institutions re-designing or constructing their learning environment to support language learning process. The study, in the end, recommends it in conceptualizing of multicultural education in the Islamic higher institutions. nevertheless, it will help to curb the differences in students' thoughts and thrive effective teaching and learning of the language studies

Beyond its limitations, this study sees an effective teaching and learning of social studies should bring about development not only to the individual learner but to the society in which such an individual lives and operates. This study realized also that learning in an individual is somehow a complex phenomenon and it depends on a multitude of factors let say; the teacher, the learner, the institutional environment among others. Therefore for learning to take place effectively, there has to be an interaction among the various factors. Nevertheless, this study recommended that Islamic higher institutions to see the school as a social system in implementing a multicultural education so it cannot be cannot be overemphasized. The institutions, as well as the society, must think of the school as a social system in which all of its variables are closely interrelated and the formalized curriculum and course of study. Therefore their duty is to create and sustain an effective multicultural school environment.

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