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Nurturing Critical Thinking in Pre-Service English Teacher Education Programs in Indonesia

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Abstract: *The dynamics of the role of English at the national and international levels needs to be taken into substantial consideration in the implementation of Pre-service English Teacher Education Programs (PETEPs) in Indonesia. Such awareness will help PETEPs in Indonesia to deal with linguistic, socio-cultural, economic, and educational consequences arising from the role of the international language relevantly. Failure to recognize and respond to this phenomenon in a timely fashion is potentially detrimental in efforts to maintain the currency of PETEPs in the country. In this paper, it is argued that critical thinking skills of individuals involved in implementing PETEPs contribute significantly in ensuring relevance between the programs and the role of English nationally and internationally. This proposition is supported by the notion that that the process of critical thinking has an impact on, not only change of belief, but also on action. In the implementation of PETEPs in Indonesia, the tendency to follow past practices and old beliefs still prevails, which, based on the author's observation, is derived from lack of efforts to nurture critical thinking. The purpose of this paper is, thus, to argue that PETEPs in Indonesia should nurture critical thinking in the whole process of their implementation.*

Keywords: *Critical thinking, English, Preservice teacher education, Indonesia*

1. Introduction

The current dynamics of the role of English at the national and international levels needs to be taken into substantial consideration in the implementation of Pre-service English Teacher Education Programs (PETEPs) in Indonesia. Such awareness will help PETEPs in Indonesia deal with socio-cultural, economic, and educational consequences attached to the role of the international language appropriately. Failure to recognize and respond to this phenomenon in a timely fashion is potentially detrimental in efforts to maintain the currency of PETEPs in the country.

Although several recent ELT conferences in Indonesia have shed light on the issue, how much PETEPs in Indonesia have adjusted to the current role of English remains unknown. It is believed that critical thinking will become the driving force for people involved in PETEPs to maintain relevance between the programs and the role of English domestically and internationally. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to argue that PETEPs in Indonesia should nurture critical thinking in the whole process of their implementation.

2. Overview of PETEPs in Indonesia

In Indonesia, PETEPs are normally conducted by the Department of English Education in universities and colleges. The major purpose of the programs is to meet the need for English teachers to teach English in Indonesian secondary schools, as well as in primary schools, which have recently shown increasing demand for English teachers (Duncumb, Chodidjah, 2006). In general, it takes between four to five years for teacher trainees¹ to complete this undergraduate program.

¹ For technical reason, the term 'teacher trainee' is still used in this paper. However, the author strongly agrees with Richards (1990) that 'education', not 'training' should become the primary focus of second language teacher education

In order to meet the qualification as English teachers in Indonesian schools, teacher trainees attending PETEPs in Indonesian universities are generally required take five different types of courses, namely courses on character building, courses on Linguistics and English skills, courses on professional skills, courses on ELT pedagogy and practices, and courses on community outreach (see appendix 1 for a sample complete list of courses). Some minor variations may be found in the curriculum of PETEPs in Indonesian universities to meet the institutional criteria set by each university. These may be driven by religious, organizational, or local values embedded in PETEPs in each university.

It is important to note that courses on Linguistics and English skills, aimed at improving teacher trainees' mastery 'about' English and 'how to use' the language, constitute more than 50% of the total courses offered. This seems to justify the notion that mastery of English should become the biggest concern in preparation to become an English teacher. If this is still the case in present PETEPs in Indonesia, it implies that the PETEPs community in this country has failed to adjust to the development and current trends in second/foreign language teacher education. Richards (1990) indicates that the field of second language teacher education has shifted its focus from primarily relying on "the study of phonetics and grammatical theory" (p.3)—which traditionally is deemed sufficient for one to become a language teacher—to more focus on educating teacher trainees to teach the language.

A closer look at the PETEPs curriculum, added with the author's observation and experience as an English teacher educator in an Indonesian university, reveals that critical thinking has not become a dominant driving force in the design and implementation of PETEPs in Indonesia. Absence or vagueness of standards set for applicants to enter the programs and the predominantly knowledge transfer approach in the implementation of the program (Citraaningtyas, 2005) are among major issues in Indonesian PETEPs that all contradict the principles of critical thinking such as "clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness" (Scriven & Paul, 1987 Paragraph 1). This brings us to the next part of this paper—a discussion on the importance of critical thinking in PETEPs in Indonesia.

3. The importance of nurturing critical thinking in PETEPs in Indonesia

There are three major reasons why critical thinking should be nurtured in the implementation PETEPs in Indonesia. These are the strategic role of English teachers in the empowerment of Indonesian human resources, the role of English as the world's lingua franca, and complexity of (English) education in Indonesia. Each of these issues will be discussed below.

The Role of English Teachers in the Empowerment of Indonesian Human Resources

English teachers play a significant role in improving the quality of Indonesian human resources, and therefore PETEPs in Indonesian universities need to respond accordingly by incorporating the process of critical thinking in the implementation of the programs. Studies by Nunan (2003) and Graddol (2000, 2006) indicate that English teacher education programs are in a strategic position to contribute to the empowerment of human resources across Asia, even though it has also been found that most of the programs have failed to play their roles properly.

The need of PETEPs in Indonesia to include critical thinking is based on the fact that, unlike teachers of other subjects at school, English teachers actually carry out their duties within two strategic contexts. The first of these is the fact that the language they teach is the biggest international language with speakers from both English-speaking countries and non-English-speaking countries. The second context is the role of English for supporting and advancing students' academic competence in other subjects such as Math, Science, Arts, etc. Recent trends in many countries, including Indonesia, to introduce the Teaching of English to Young Learners English (TEYLs) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Duncumb, Chodidjah, 2006 and Graddol, 2006) is an indication of how this strategic role of English teachers needs to be catered for by nurturing the culture of critical thinking in PETEPs. The ability to do this reflects the potential to bring "clarity, precision, accuracy, relevance, depth, breadth, and logicalness" (Paul et al, 1997, paragraph 8), all of which constitute characteristics of critical thinking necessary to solve problems surrounding the efforts to bring about autonomous PETEPs graduates.

This suggests that the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of PETEPs in Indonesia need to be carried out with the spirit of critical thinking. Moreover, as suggested by Lengkanawati (2005), English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia has long been considered a failure. While certainly there is a range of factors that can be attributed to this failure, the teacher factor deserves to be taken into account specifically. To solve this problem, nurturing critical thinking should be deemed important in PETEPs because it leads to informed decisions, well-planned programs, and continuous evaluation in developing and shaping the teaching qualification of English teacher trainees. It is such this type of PETEPs that will results in English teachers who are equipped with critical thinking skills to contribute to the improvement of the quality of Indonesian human resources.

The Role of English as the World's Lingua Franca

There have been a number of studies indicating the close relationship between the need to nurture critical thinking in PETEPs and the role of English as the world's lingua franca. In addition to Nunan (2003) and Graddol (2000, 2006), studies by McKay (2003) and Hadley (2004) imply that there are socio-cultural, economic, political, and educational issues surrounding the implementation of English teacher education. Questions such as which English should be taught to students—local/regional or Standard English, and whether teachers should teach English for the sake of their national interests or unconsciously for the sake of "neocolonial reconstruction" (Hadley, 2004 p. 2) are among issues that suggest the need to nurture considerable amount of critical thinking to teacher trainees, lecturers, and program administrators in PETEPs in Indonesia. Unfortunately, the author's observation as a teacher educator in an Indonesian PETEP shows that there has been no significant awareness and efforts to nurture critical thinking in pre-service English teacher education in Indonesia. Vagueness of entrance criteria into the program and uncritical distribution of courses offered, as seen in appendix 1, are among the major indications of lack of attention by PETEPs on this issue.

It is not adequate for PETEPs to focus only on linguistic and pedagogical aspects of teaching English without having a critical look at how the current role of English as the world' lingua franca affects the English teaching profession. The bigger number

of non-native speakers of English (Graddol, 2006), for example, indicates the bigger probability to use English among non-native speakers of English from different first languages and cultures. A critical thinking process on this issue may lead PETEPs to offer a course on cross-cultural understanding that covers not only issues of using English between non-native speakers and native speakers, but also those between non-native speakers and non-native speakers of different cultures and first languages.

Complexity of (English) Education in Indonesia

PETEPs as 'the producers' of English teachers in Indonesia are faced with some complex issues of education in this country. These may range from inconsistency between policy and practices of education, lack of students' exposure to English communication, to lack of facilities to support teaching and learning process. PETEP as a unit under a higher education institution has the autonomy to design and implement English teacher education program that helps solve problems resulting from this complexity.

It is in this light that critical thinking needs to be nurtured in PETEPs since absence or lack of critical thinking will lead to inability to renew and re-energize the program. This is reflected by Bismoko's (2003) proposal to "reorient" and "redesign" English teacher education in Indonesia in response to issues such as varying outcomes of students' learning, the implementation of school-based management, and the competence-based curriculum. In other words, intellectual practices of critical thinkers such as "monitoring, assessing, and reviewing [...] goals and purposes" (Paul et al, 1997 paragraph 8) should become a major concern for people involved in the programs. The complexity of English education in Indonesia will remain as a threat to improvement of its quality without a fine balance of efforts to nurture critical thinking in the implementation of the programs. Change for the better can only be realized when substantial proportion of critical thinking is put at the forefront of this complex education situation.

4. Conclusion

In addition to the widely-acknowledged strong association between critical thinking and writing or speaking in academic settings (Vandermensbrugge, 2004; Ballard and Clanchy, 1991), this paper has attempted to bring the notion and benefit of critical thinking to a broader context, that is, the institutional context of Pre-service Teacher Education Programs in Indonesia. It is argued that critical thinking should be inherently integrated into the implementation of English teacher education in Indonesian universities. The paper has shown that the dynamics of the role of English in the context of Indonesian national development and international relations is the major driving force to bring the notion of critical thinking into this broader perspective. Considering the preliminary nature of the discussion in this paper, further research in this area needs to include discussion regarding the challenges and possible solutions for nurturing critical thinking in PETEPs in Indonesia so as to provide stronger scholarly legitimacy to this proposition.

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