

# CULTURE, CONTENT AND COMPETENCY TOWARDS ENGLISH LEARNING OF STUDENTS OF OPEN JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL\*)

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*English as an International language plays an important role in communication among people in the world. It ranges from developed countries to developing countries. Indonesia, as a developing country in Southeast Asia, is also placing English as an important subject in elementary to higher schools. The Ministry of Education plans to apply another approach in teaching English for elementary to secondary students in the coming 2004 English curriculum, that is 'Competency-based Curriculum'. Based on the writer's experience as an English teacher, attending seminars on English teaching, and the most important is some field researches conducted by his office, this paper will explain about the culture, content, and competency towards English learning of students of open junior secondary school. Open Junior Secondary School (OJSS) is chosen as this is a special program for, particularly, the needy people who could not afford to send their kids to regular schools or the kids who could not enter regular schools for academic reason. The culture of most Indonesian kids especially in rural areas are shy, inferior, and have a little social constraint. To correspond to this reality, the content or the learning material is also adjusted to their needs and interests. And, eventually they will also gain the English competency according to their effort. How they learn English, which content is best presented to them, and how good they achieve English are presented in this paper.*

*SEAMEO SEAMOLEC is Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Regional Open Learning Center (SEAMOLEC). It is a Center which deals with research and development, training, information and technology exchange, sharing expertise and resources within and outside the region in the field of open and distance learning. Recently SEAMEO SEAMOLEC conducted a distance training for Open Junior Secondary School English language teachers on how to deliver English language tutorial to the students. The results indicate the participants have more knowledge about the background of their students, and the appropriate content of learning for them. Therefore, it is recommended the English teachers, especially of Open Junior Secondary School English teachers, to select appropriate English teaching materials and to use various techniques and approaches.*

## **Background**

English as an International language plays an important role in communication among people in the world. It ranges from developed countries to under developed countries. Indonesia, as a developing country in Southeast Asia, is also placing English as an important subject in elementary to higher schools. Junior secondary schools have existed in two modes, regular and open junior secondary schools. A focus in this paper will be the issues in the teaching of English language in the open junior secondary schools (OJSS). It arouses from the cultural, content, and competency issues in the teaching of English language for the OJSS students. Moreover, this seems very important as starting 2004 the Ministry of Education plans to apply another approach in teaching English for elementary to secondary school students known as the 'Competency-based Curriculum'. Cultural aspect has showed a significant barrier as the students have to learn English as a foreign language and to study in distance as well. While the content or the teaching material is also an important issue as to correspond with the new curriculum or the competency-based

curriculum. The content may impact to the success of the implementation of the curriculum. All the issues are the concerns of the writer to the OJSS.

### **Competency-based curriculum**

The department of National Education of Indonesia has a policy on developing curriculum every ten years. In 2004, the curriculum is named as competency-based curriculum. In English subject in particular, they use pedagogical considerations from Celce-Murcia, Dornyei and Thurrell (1995) in their compatible that language is communication, not only a set of regulations. The consequence is the curriculum aims at preparing students for having mastered in communication. This means the curriculum is also aiming at providing Communicative Competence for the students.

The main competence according to Celce and Murcia is Discourse Competence. It means when someone communicates orally or by writing, he or she involves in a discourse. Discourse in this case means a communication activity influenced by a topic, good interpersonal relation, and a communication path in certain culture. The prerequisite to the competency is the supporting competencies like linguistic competency, actional competence, and sociocultural competence, and strategic competence. To ensure the discourse competency, the teaching outline and the English indicators should be based on the above supporting competencies.

### **Cultural view towards the OJSS**

Culture is a view on habit or routine activities. Most of Indonesian culture on teaching and learning activity is still in face-to-face (f-t-f) instruction. The decrease of the number of students of open junior secondary schools is mostly influenced by the 'habit' on the f-t-f learning culture. The role of parents together with f-t-f culture also play role in the decrease of the number of students. According to the OJSS report 1999/2000 the number of the OJSS students is 230,536. Compared with five years ago which was with more than 300,000 students, there was a significant decrease. Most parents are not willing to send their kids to the OJSS as their kids do not go to schools everyday like their colleagues in conventional school do. Moreover, they are allowed not to wear uniforms and even to be in bare feet. This learning condition is quite contrary with the common culture that they used to meeting everyday as a strong signal of social human beings activity practiced in the conventional schools. This culture of learning makes them hard to do self-learning activity. Eventhough in OJSS there are some chances for the students to meet each other for example in tutorial activity, in using their main-school's activities like, laboratorium practices, sport activity and social activities. In some places, parents and students often asked if the certificate is recognized by the community.

### **Content**

English teaching material for junior secondary school students follow curriculum issued by the Ministry of National Education of Indonesia. In the last 10 years, teachers use 1994 curriculum. This curriculum applies theme-based curriculum and also the text-based curriculum. Theme-based curriculum is used as the approach because to make the students interested in the English lesson, teachers may start teaching using the most

familiar theme to the students. Besides, the theme-based approach carries the students to come to a more familiar situation of learning.

### **English Competency for OJSS students**

English competency is an integration of the classic four language competencies, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Eventhough curriculum 1994 has pursued the four competencies, the competency-based approach is stated more clearly in 2004. So it is known as the competency-based curriculum. It seems fantastic when we refer to the condition of the teaching and learning of OJSS students. As this is shown by a gap stands in front when the curriculum is implemented. The gap is the barriers of learning English for Indonesian students particularly for OJSS students.

### **The barrier of OJSS students in learning English**

1. English is not the Indonesian's second language. It is a foreign or international language.
2. The students of OJSS generally come from low economic society.
3. The English teachers may not apply communicative instruction approach.
4. Lack of student support services
5. Geographical factors

### **English is not the Indonesians' second language.**

Education in Indonesia places English as the first international language (curriculum 1994). This is because Indonesian people commit to the Indonesian language as its national language, and English is the 'biggest' international language. Consequently, students do not speak English with each other in the school, at home, and in out of home or school. They mostly communicate in Indonesian language or even in their native language with their peers and families. Consequently, they do not have enough chance to practice and, thus they lack of exposure by the same time.

### **The students of OJSS generally come from low-economic society.**

OJSS was established to cater students who cannot enter regular schools for school fees, or for academic achievement. Students with that condition usually have the phenomenon of low achievement in learning. No wonder as their parents prefer to ask their kids to help them earn money by working in the rice fields, in plantations, and on the sea. The kids also often have to look for money by themselves, like street vendors, and shoe polishers. In such condition, it is hard for them to share time for studying and they are mostly already tired. In some students, they have a good learning achievement. It may happen because they may have special talent in language and they may have strong motivation to learning English.

The English teachers may not apply communicative instruction approach.

Most of English teachers still use traditional method, like grammar translation method. Teachers still tend to use the method as this can be done using one-way communication or mostly done in teacher-oriented way of teaching. This technique of teaching makes students passive. If this method is applied in the tutorial, OJSS students will not experience the nature of language learning. They have to speak or to use English for communication. More unsuitable is when it is applied in tutorials. Students should have more chance to speak English.

### **Lack of student support services**

In the OJSS practice, students have student support services. They are, for example tutorials, and all facilities in the base schools, sport facility, library, laboratories, counseling, and extra school activities.

Tutorial is not like teaching. Tutorial is mainly student-based initiatives. When no question, or problems exposed from students, teachers find difficulty to start tutorial. Teachers then should do probing, motivating and forcing students to come up with problems to be solved. Again, often teachers are not satisfied. The culture then becomes the reason. They are shy, inferior, and slow-learners. In English lesson, this is regarded as the most critical chance. Once the students do not have a chance to practice English, they miss to practice it.

Facilities, teaching method in tutorial and environment at the base schools should help these kinds of students. They should be able to condition the students to learn English.

### **Geographical factors**

A lot of OJSS students live in remote areas. This makes them hard to visit their school even once a week for tutorial. They do not have time to communicate with their peer and their teacher. It means they have little time to practice English. In some places, even teachers pick up their students to join a summative test or national final test. They do this as their students do not have money to go to the base school. In some areas also there is a two-way radio communication facility for the students who live far from the base schools. We do not have data how far they make use of this facility. If they use it, it will help much to the students to listen to their teachers speak English. The facility also encourages the students to dare to speak English with their teachers. Shy students can dare themselves to speak English.

With such conditions, can curriculum 2004 come with competency-based curriculum?

This very critical question is hard to be answered. If we compare the two conditions, students learning English in regular schools and those in OJSS can be seen as follows,

	<b>In regular schools</b>	<b>In OJSS</b>
1.	Students receive 4 hours (4X45') of English lesson in a week.	OJSS students receive 2 hours (2X45') of English lesson in a week in their tutorial.
2.	They have enough exposure from the	They have less exposure than their

	class.	colleagues have in regular schools.
3.	As they are in school during the school-days, they can enjoy all school facilities and have more chance to practice English with their peers.	Only few of the students can enjoy all the school activities. They have less chance to practice English with their peers.
4.	They have more social gathering with other students and teachers.	4. They lack of social gathering with their friends and teachers.

From the two conditions we learn that OJSS students find more difficulty in mastering English than the regular students do.

So, what best practices are recommended for the successful English instruction for OJSS students.

If we have a look for a moment on what open and distance learning is, we can refer this mode of learning as a self-learning mode which deals to the independent learning. Self-learning means students who study with the least assistance from others. This kind of style may construct him to be an independent learner. He or she may be able to decide a plan to study and manage to finish their study. Both styles require active learning. Russel (1984) mentioned active learning is a form of learning that directly engages the students in his/her learning process. Active learning is also more student-centered because students become more actively involved with the material being learned. In short , self-learning, independent learning, active learning, and student-centered learning are the characteristics of students of open and distance learning, like OJSS. These characteristics must be possessed by students of OJSS because most initiatives should come from them.

Teachers, particularly English teachers may consider these recommendations before they start teaching English to the OJSS students:

1. Help the students know what they want from English lesson.
2. Design a course and prepare materials that relate to their needs.
3. Plan the learners' support services.
4. Provide a support in a humane and responsive way.

Although most students in OJSS know that they have to follow the gifted syllabus, teachers may ask them what they really expect from English lesson. In case students do not know it, teachers may brief them on what English is. This kind of technique may push students to the next step of learning, they want to know.

The next step is teachers may start designing instructional materials that suit their needs. Teachers may think about familiar topics for them. If students of OJSS live in coastal areas, teachers may present topics on fisheries, seafood products, and other related topics. This topic is necessary as to find authentic topics for making the materials more interesting. Curriculum 1994 gives tips for deciding the theme, first should be from 'near' to 'further', form 'easy' to 'difficult', and from 'familiar' to 'unfamiliar' themes or topics.

As the students are in the absence of teachers, they should have enough support services. These tips may help students for learning English:

1. Ask them to come to the English tutorial.
2. Ask them to write letters in English when they need to ask something or just for practicing English writing.
3. Ask them to make a phone call in English to the teacher eventhough for only a few minutes. Those who have provided with two-way communication radio may make use of it.
4. Ask them to discuss a certain topic with their peers in a certain area.

To avoid drop-out, OJSS students should be given supports in a human and responsive way. Teachers give support by telling them about the advantages of learning English. Teachers also can give feedback on their home assignments. The assignment should not make them feel frustrated as the speed of learning is different. The assignment should make them motivated, for example ask them to watch English news on television or listen to English news on radios.

Have OJSS carried out the recommended tips in delivering English lessons to their students?

Some may yes, but still most of the OJSS may not be able to implement this concept of teaching. Several good OJSS may be able to carry out this concept. OJSSs like in Malang, and Mataram which have students mostly come from Islamic boarding school have good record on English. This is no wonder as the students have learned English from their boarding schools. The students are active and eager to learn English in the OJSS.

The conditions are not the same. For the other OJSS, they should start teaching English or giving tutorials in a proper way with the above mentioned tips. It's difficult but they must begin.

An innovation from Pustekom Depdiknas, the center which gave birth to the OJSS, in designing English materials for tutorials is providing English modules with audio cassettes. In that way, students may imitate the correct pronunciation, and practice their listening comprehension. In one of the observation, students feel satisfied having tutorials using the audio cassette.

In giving knowledge on how to give tutorials, SEAMEO SEAMOLEC as a Center dealing with open and distance learning contributed a TOT training on the knowledge. Teachers who are from regular schools do not have knowledge to give tutorials. Most of them just do teaching instead of tutorials. The training is a real contribution for them.

To conclude this, I can refer to Rowntree's way on knowing the learners and its implications:

<b>My learners .....</b>	<b>So I must</b>
Have mostly no systematic studying since leaving school.	Reassure and offer guidance on approaches to learning.
Differ in their types and level of learning expertise.	Make the course flexible in how it can be studied
Will be apprehensive about relating to a	Ensure tutors come across as helpers rather

tutor.	than critics.
Have or will get access to a variety of equipment.	Feel free to use technology.
Are paying for the course themselves.	Ensure that all elements offer obvious value for money

Rowntree's ideas are suitable to be applied by English teachers in OJSS.

The tips from Rowntree are likely able to answer most of the problems facing by the students in the OJSS. On accordance with the competency-based curriculum, teachers should also come the paradigm that learning is a process to construct students' achievement in English. How teachers condition the students so that they are able to find way to make students able to master English. The selection of content and experience of learning should come into consideration. The followings outcomes are best considered for teachers who want to carry out competency-based curriculum:

1. Step-by-step cognitive skills
2. Step-by-step psychomotor skills
3. Critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making process
4. Creative thinking
5. Interpersonal and social skill
6. Attitudes, appreciation, and values
7. Independent study

In step-by-step cognitive skills, tutors may apply tutorial techniques avoiding the spoon feeding technique. It is expected students come to the tutorial with questions to be asked. In this level of learning of learning, students may receive knowledge of English. But, then in the level of step-by-step psychomotor skills, students are pushed into action to use English like in communication. They can do practice critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making process. Tutors should prepare learning materials that urge them to practice them. Discussion on certain familiar topics is good to be done by the students to practice critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making. This combination may result to the creative thinking, attitude, appreciation and values of learning English .

The end result of the learning process come to the so-called independent study. When students have possessed this kind of attitude of learning, they will become successful persons in the future. They will like learning for ever. We give them ploughs, not rice.

Will the OJSS students be able to manage it? It depends on the teachers or tutors. If they did not condition the students to the way of learning, they only come to the level of cognitive. They will be vague in facing problems in the future. They will find difficulty to solve problems. They do not have self-confidence. They are dependent.

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