

INTERGRATING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS WITH SOFT SKILLS

Azwar Abbas, S.Pd., M.Hum.

English Education Study Program, Ahmad Dahlan University, Yogyakarta

azwara_abbas@yahoo.co.id

Abstract

In welcoming the 21st century, education in Indonesia faces big challenges to prepare competent human resources in order that they are competitive in the global market. Changes in educational policies have been made by the government to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. The success of education is not only the matter of getting much knowledge by students. Students are also demanded to have soft skills in order to be able to compete with others and to be independent or autonomous. Students must also know the nature of learning and use their knowledge and skills to solve problems in their life. One of the important ways to make students capable of solving problems in their life is by integrating and developing soft skills in the teaching and learning process, including English language teaching and learning. This paper aims at (1) describing the nature of soft skills in the context of English language teaching and learning and (2) describing the process of integrating the soft skills in the lesson plan, the instructional materials, the instructional activities, and the assessment of the students' achievement. Therefore, this paper is expected to give teachers of English practical procedures of integrating soft skills in their English language teaching and learning so that Indonesian students are really ready to face challenges in the global market.

Key words: integrating, English teaching and learning, soft skills

1. INTRODUCTION

Lately, people are worried about the condition of Indonesian young people, especially students. Violence among students often becomes a hot topic for the national media. They students are also suspected to have committed some other amoral behaviors. These conditions have been great challenges for Indonesian education in preparing best quality human resources. Moreover, having hard skills or life skills is not the only one thing to bring one's success. Students should also have good and strong characters or soft skills in their life. People have a more impoverished view of what good character and human excellence means. They tend to think of it as some combination of literacy and hard skills plus being a moral person. However, there are many important character traits that are missing from that view. High-quality education needs to develop a balanced human excellence. Both soft skills and hard skills are important, and soft skills means not only getting along well with fellow students and the teacher. It also includes the ability to plan, to defer gratification, and to pursue goals. There are at least two main reasons behind the need in strengthening students' soft skills. First, criticisms from employers that graduates are generally academically proficient but lack in soft skills such as communication and analytical skills. Second, the increasing globalization of the work force and job market imposes much more competitive skills on the students. Globalization, which can be interpreted as the increasing integration of various sectors in today's world (Eastern Province Herald, June 7, 2001), leads to a demand for higher level skills and techniques (De Lange 2002).

Nowadays, English has become a global language, and it has been used for all aspects of life, including science and technology. Therefore, learning English and all the aspects has become an important need. In another word, lack of English mastery can make people unable to compete with others in this era. To ease the transfer of science and technology, English has become a compulsory subject for all levels of school. Even, English has been introduced to the students of kindergarten. However, English language teaching may not merely focus on the language mastery. It must also focus on how to transfer characters or soft skills to the students. From this statement, it is clear that all English teachers should be able to conduct the process of teaching and learning English integrated with the efforts of building good characters or soft skills of the students. This is in line with the vision and the mission of national education which states that the process of teaching and learning must be directed to give more roles to the learners to develop their potential and creativity in order to establish human being having religious and spiritual power, an exalted standard of character, good personality, multiple intelligence, healthy body and soul as well as having skills needed by themselves, by their society, and by their nation and country (Depdiknas, 2005:74). In order to achieve these goals, English teachers can integrate their

English teaching and soft skills through the four basic elements of language teaching, namely: lesson plan, teaching materials, teaching activities, and assessment.

2. DISCUSSION

This paper aims at (1) describing the nature of soft skills in the context of English language teaching and learning and (2) describing the process of integrating the soft skills in the lesson plan, the instructional materials, the instructional activities, and the assessment of the students' achievement.

The Nature of Soft Skills

Soft skills are identified to be the most critical skills in the current global job market, especially in a fast moved era of technology. The reorientation of education which is one trust of education for sustainability also relates the importance of these so-called soft skills. According to Paajanen (1992), soft skills is a sociological term relating to a person's "EQ" (Emotional Intelligence Quotient), the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that characterize relationships with other people. The Malaysian Institute of Higher Learning in Roselina (2009) interprets soft skills as incorporating aspects of generic skills which include non-academic skills such as leadership, teamwork, communication, and lifelong learning. From these definitions, it can be understood that soft skills consists of sub skills possessed by everyone to support their life. One's success is not merely influenced by his/her intelligence, but, for example, his/her ability to communicate or work together with others.

As posted by Jain (2009), vast research and expert opinions have been sought in the effort to determine the specific soft skills to be implemented and used in higher institutions of learning. Based on the research findings obtained, seven soft skills have been identified and chosen to be implemented in all institutions of higher learning here. They are communicative skills, thinking skills and problem solving skills, team work force, life-long learning and information management, entrepreneur skill, ethics, moral and professionalism, and leadership skills. It can be observed that education is an essential tool for achieving sustainability. Everybody realizes that the current economic development trends are not sustainable and that public awareness, education and training are the key elements to move our society towards sustainability. Only a quality future human capital can envision development of its nation to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Therefore, the inculcation of soft skills among the students will be two prongs, to produce quality human capital and to develop their knowledge, understanding, values and skills as well. Each of the skills is briefly discussed in the following parts.

Communication skills

Students are expected to be fluent and able to communicate effectively in both Bahasa Indonesia and English. They should be able to convey their thoughts with clarity and confidence both in written and oral forms. They are also expected to be active listeners while providing the necessary response. Finally, should also be capable of giving and using technology during presentations confidently.

Critical thinking and problem solving skills

With this skill, students should be able to think in a critical, creative, innovative, and analytical manner which includes the ability to apply knowledge. Elements that students must possess under this aspect are the ability to identify and analyze complex situation as well as making evaluations that are justifiable. They should also have the ability to expand and improve thinking skills, to provide ideas, and alternative solutions.

Team work

Team work skills involve the ability to work and cooperate with people from various social and cultural backgrounds so as to achieve a common goal. In order to build a good working relationship with his/her peers, it is essential that students are respectful toward others' attitude, behavior, and belief. From time to time students are also expected to undertake the role of a leader and a group member.

Lifelong learning and information management skills

In acquiring skills and knowledge, students should be able to do self-regulated learning independently. They must be autonomous learners. They should have the skills to search for relevant information from various sources and able to manage them efficiently. They should also be receptive to new ideas and able to develop an inquiry mind. Therefore, students must ability to use the information technology wisely.

Entrepreneurship skill

This skill involves the ability to venture into business and work-related opportunities while creating risk awareness. This skill includes the ability to identify business opportunities and be able to prepare, build, and explore business plans which eventually leads to self-employment. This skill is also expected to make students to think others' prosperity because they become the problem solvers of the unemployment, not the part of the problem.

Ethics and professional moral

With the above skill, students are able to practice with high moral standards in the relevant professional practice. Students should also be able to understand the effects of economy, environment, and socio-cultural factors on their respective professional practice. In relation to ethical issues, students should be able to analyze and arrive at decisions in matters concerning ethics. In their environment, students should be able to practice good ethics while having a sense of responsibility toward society.

Leadership skill

Leadership skill entails the ability to lead in various activities. Students should have the knowledge on basic leadership theories which will enable them to lead a project. It is also essential that they are able to understand the role of a leader and a group member and be able to carry out those roles interchangeably. With ethics, students can be ideal leaders in the future and they are expected to be able to build a new nation for Indonesia.

The Process of Integrating Soft Skills in English Language Teaching

As stated in the previous parts, English teachers must be aware that they have a great responsibility in developing students' soft skills through English teaching learning process. They cannot only teach English just to make students able to speak or write. Teachers must also build their students' attitude, ethic, or responsibility. Building soft skills can be integrated in the four main parts of language teaching and they are described as follows.

How to integrate soft skills in lesson plan

Planning is a way the teacher is going to conduct the teaching in order to achieve the objectives effectively and efficiently. According to Burden and Byrd (1999:51), a comprehensive planning preparation is needed for effective teaching in all grade levels. He further states that planning is a critical function to ensure student learning, and it was taken from two reasons: (1) the planning process helps the teacher to organize the content of the curriculum and to address the complex classroom variables. The variables are instructional objectives, time, appropriate teaching strategies, available materials, media, and so forth, (2) the planning process provides the teacher with a sense of direction and feeling of confidence and security. Therefore, Harmer (2002:308) suggests that before making a lesson plan a teacher needs considering a number of crucial factors such as the language level of the students, their educational and cultural background, their likely level of motivation, and their different learning style.

In designing the lesson plans, teachers refer to the syllabus developed by the Body of National Standard of Education (BNSP). The main components of lesson plan are the standard of competence, the basic competence, the indicators, the instructional objectives, the instructional materials, the teaching-learning activities, the source of material and media, the method/technique used, and the assessment process. The integration of the soft skills in the lesson plans made by the English teacher can be done in the section of the instructional materials and the instructional activities. In the section of the instructional materials of the lesson plans, the teacher write the main materials based on the pre-determined instructional objectives which are formulated based on the indicators and the basic competences taken from the syllabus. The main instructional materials written by the teacher consist of kinds of texts, language components related to the topics that would be taught, and the soft skills that would be integrated. Meanwhile, in the section of the instructional activities in the lesson plans, the integration of the soft skills can be done by making lists of the activities, for example, greeting students, relating the topic discussed to certain soft skills, and closing the class by giving motivation to the students.

How to integrate soft skills in materials

Materials, especially authentic materials, play a significant role in foreign language teaching. They are not simply the everyday tools of the language teachers; they are an embodiment of the aims and methods of the particular teaching/learning situation. Through evaluation and development, teachers can assess whether the materials are the most appropriate for the target learners at various levels and in various teaching settings. Dubin and Olstein (1986:29) state that in an idealized model, materials draw on the content of a syllabus, reducing broader objective to more manageable ones. They, then, say that ideal materials should present teacher and

learners with a jumping-off place, a stimulus for the learning process at each point. Besides, effective materials should enable experienced teachers and autonomous learners to develop their own alternatives according to their needs and personal preferences (1986:30). Hutchinson and Waters (1987:107) explain that good materials will contain interesting texts, enjoyable activities which engage the learners' thinking capacities, opportunities for learners to use their existing knowledge and skills, and content which both learner and teacher can cope with. There are many kinds of English materials. Richard and Renandya (2002: 66) states that English instructional material may take forms of printed, non-printed material, and materials that comprise both printed and non-printed material.

Bringing literary works as learning materials into English classroom brings some benefits for developing students' soft skills. Below is the summary of the possible works and benefits for the students' soft skills.

Table 1. Literature for English Learning Materials

Literature	Benefits	Soft Skills
Poems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides readers with a different viewpoint towards language use • triggers unmotivated readers • evokes feelings and thoughts in heart and in mind, □ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicative skills • Thinking skills and Problem solving skills • Ethics, moral and professionalism • Leadership skills
Short stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enlarges the advanced level readers' worldviews about different cultures and different groups of people, • motivates learners to read due to being an authentic material, • gives students the chance to use their creativity, • promotes critical thinking skills, • facilitates teaching a foreign culture (i.e. serves as a valuable instrument in attaining cultural knowledge of the selected community, • makes students feel themselves comfortable and free, □ • helps students coming from various backgrounds communicate with each other because of its universal language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicative skills • Thinking skills and Problem solving skills • Team work force • Life-long learning and Information Management • Ethics, moral and professionalism
Dramas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stimulates the imagination and promotes creative thinking, • develops critical thinking skills, • promotes language development, • heightens effective listening skills, • strengthens comprehension and learning retention by involving the senses as an integral part of the learning process, • increases empathy and awareness of others, • fosters peer respect and group cooperation, • reinforces positive self-concept, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicative skills • Thinking skills and Problem solving skills • Team work force • Life-long learning and Information Management • Ethics, moral and professionalism • Leadership skills
Novels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develops the advanced level readers' knowledge about different cultures and different groups of people, • increases students' motivation to read owing to being an authentic material, • offers real life / real life like settings, • gives students the opportunity to make use of their creativity, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicative skills • Thinking skills and Problem solving skills • Life-long learning and Information Management • Ethics, moral and professionalism

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improves critical thinking skills, • paves the way for teaching the target language culture, • enables students to go beyond what is written and dive into what is meant, 	
--	---	--

From the table above, bringing literature into the English classroom is much more beneficial than bringing only English textbooks. Therefore, teachers may combine their teaching materials. Besides, teachers may also bring songs in their classroom because songs can create good atmosphere in the classroom. Students can enjoy the learning and their musical intelligence will make them respect beauty and harmony.

How to integrate soft skills in learning activities

English teachers must be able to formulate appropriate learning activities because learning activities may give students greater chance to develop their soft skills. Learning activities (European Community, 2006: 9) are understood as “any activities of an individual organized with the intention to improve his/her knowledge, skills and competence.” The two fundamental criteria to distinguish learning activities from non-learning activities are: the activity must be intentional (as opposed to random learning), so the act has a predetermined purpose and the activity is organized in some way, including being organized by the learner himself/herself; it typically involves the transfer of information in a broader sense (messages, ideas, knowledge, strategies). Below is the summary of the learning activities teachers may bring into their English classroom to build students’ soft skills.

Table 2. Soft Skills and Learning Activities or Strategies

Soft Skills	Learning Activities
Communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral quizzes (listening and verbal) • Presentations (verbal, written, diagrammatic) • Role playing • Adding documentation to existing programs • Modeling use of formal language in classroom • Summarizing what has been said. • Debates • Comparison of literature work, websites, etc. • Peer assessment • Modeling use of formal language in classroom for different audience. • Preparing influential introductions.
Thinking skills and Problem solving skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparing solutions for a problem and providing new alternatives • Interpreting diagrams , graphs, statistical illustration, maps, etc. • Generating questions that go beyond simple recall to higher order of thinking • Relating new understanding to other concepts • Giving students sample problems with missing information • Giving variety of testing techniques
Team work force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assigning group tasks that allow each group member an equal contribution • Explaining the objectives of the group task and how it will be assessed • Giving opportunities for the group to evaluate their effectiveness • Encouraging groups to design action plans
Life-long learning and Information Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requiring email submissions of homework • Designing presentations, • Having communication with teachers through email, Facebook, or Twitter
Entrepreneur skill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking students to read the biography of great and successful entrepreneurs like Jusuf Kalla • Asking students to visit entrepreneurship centers and make a report

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role playing
Ethics, moral and professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role playing • Debating • Asking students to have a focus group discussion • Having literary appreciation like poetry recital or theater performance
Leadership skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving students rubric • Giving students checklists, subtitles, graphic organizers, mind maps, etc. • Teaching student how to highlight important information, take meaningful notes. • Logging learning goals, new ideas and skills, additional home study to prepare for next class. • Allowing hand-written “cheat sheets” in exams. • Being consistent in applying deadlines

How to integrate soft skills in assessment

Assessment is the last and important part in the learning process. Through assessment, teachers can understand students' performance as well as their soft skills development. Assessment is defined as the activities and processes involved in judging performance. Peer assessment can be an alternative. In peer assessment, students are involved in assessing the work of others (Reese-Durham, 2005). Hundreds of studies have established that human behavior is shaped by intrinsic motivation and extrinsic rewards, and that extrinsic rewards positively influence intrinsic motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). The performance assessment is an extrinsic reward that has tremendous influence over what and how students learn (Gibbs & Haveshaw, 1989).

Peer evaluation also provides a learning opportunity for students to develop the ability to realistically judge the performance of others as well as their own. Boud & Lublin (1983) considered peer assessment one of the most important teaching methodologies. Fry (1990, p.181) validated five advantages of peer evaluation:

1. Students are encouraged to tackle problems outside the tutorial session.
2. In grading others' work, students appreciate and reinforce the correct solutions;
3. Students become aware of the grading scheme and appreciate the reasoning behind points awarded or deducted.
4. In grading others' work, students realize the importance of clearly presenting the solution.
5. The instructor can act as a facilitator rather than an assessor.

From the statement above, peer assessment can build some soft skills for students. They can develop communication skills, they can be critical in thinking and taking a decision, and they can work together and respect others. However, teachers may also use other kinds of assessment like performance-based assessment or authentic assessment.

3. CONCLUSION

In the global competition, students have to develop their soft skills. English teachers may also play their role in developing students' soft skills. In English learning process teachers can integrate soft skills with the four basic components of the learning process. While designing the lesson plan, English teachers must be able to determine learning outputs, materials, strategies, and assessments that may encourage students to develop their soft skills. Next, appropriate leaning materials are also needed. Teachers can bring literature or other authentic materials in the English classroom. Learning activities or learning strategies can also influence the success of building soft skills. Teachers are expected to be careful in choosing learning activities. Active learning is supposed to be the most appropriate activities for all the soft skill. Last, the success of soft skills is also influenced by the learning assessment. Performance assessment and peer assessment can be implemented to measure the students' achievement in English as well as their soft skills.

REFERENCES

- [1] Boud, D. & Lublin, J. (1983). Student self-assessment: Educational benefits within existing resources. In G. Squires (Ed.), *Innovation through recession* (Vol. 1, pp. 93-99). Guildford, Surrey, England: Society for Research into Higher Education.
- [2] Burden, P. R. & Byrd, D. M. 1999. *Methods for Effective Teaching*. 2nd edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

- [3] De Lange, G. (2002). Cooperative education interventions aimed at transferring new Technologies from a developed economy: Germany/South African collaboration in the automotive industry. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 3(1), 13–15.
- [4] Deci, E. L., Koestner, R., & Ryan, R. M. (1999). A meta-analytic review of experiments examining the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125(6), 627-68.
- [5] Depdiknas. 2005. *Peraturan Pemerintah RI Nomor 19 Tahun 2005 tentang Standar Nasional Pendidikan*. Jakarta: Depdiknas.
- [6] Dubin, Fraida dan Elite Olsthain. 1986. *Course Design: Developing Programs and Materials for Language Learning*.
- [7] Eastern Province Herald. (2001). Globalization—The effects on developing economies.
- [8] Europoean Community. 2006. Classification of Learning Activities – Manual.
- [9] Falchikov, N. (1986). Product comparisons and process benefits of collaborative peer group and self assessments. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 11(2), 146-66.
- [10] Fry, S. (1990). Implementation and evaluation of peer marking in higher education. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 15(3), 177-89.
- [11] Gibbs, G., & Habeshaw, T. (1989). *Preparing to teach*. Bristol: Technical and Educational Services, Ltd.
- [12] Harmer, Jeremy. 2002. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Harlow, Essex: Longman.
- [13] Hutchinson, Tom dan Alan Waters. 1987. *English for Specific Purposes: A Learning-centered Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [14] Jain, Vishal. (2009). *Importance of Soft skills development in education*. Available at <http://schoolofeducators.com/2009/02/importance-of-soft-skills-development-in-education/>
- [15] Paajanen, George (1992), *Employment Inventory Reports*, Technology Based Solutions/ Personnel Decisions, Inc.
- [16] Reese-Durham, N. (2005). Peer evaluation as an active learning technique. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 32(4), 338-343.
- [17] Richard, J. C. & Renandya, W. A. 2002. *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [18] Shakir, Roselina. (2009). Soft skills at the Malaysian institutes of higher learning. *Asia Pacific Education Review*. P. 309 – 315.
- [19] Schmidt, H. G. (1983). Problem-based learning: rationale and description, *Medical Education*, 17, 11-16.