The Rationale for Introducing "Global Issues" in English Textbook Development

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Abstract—Today, global issues (GI), known as a well-established branch of language teaching field in general and English language teaching in particular, has gained increasing interest among the teaching community. In Sampedro and Hillyard' s (2004) terms, global issues can no longer be dismissed as the "out there", but they are very much "in here" too and can no longer be safely ignored. Matsuda (2006) also points out since at present learners want to become effective users of English in the international context, some awareness of global cultures and issues needs to be fostered. Pass all doubt, in a globalizing world, when every corner of the planet is being affected by the phenomenon of globalization as an inevitable reality of the modern society, the need to understand other cultures, societies as well as the challenges and problems which we are faced with seems increasingly important. Certainly, one of the primary aims of language learning and especially English language which is known as a global and international language is facilitating the communication among the cultures and peoples. Since GI is a new approach to foreign language teaching and aims to enable learners to efficiently acquire and use a foreign language while empowering them with the knowledge, skills and commitment required by world citizens for the solution of global problems, using this approach can effectively integrate a global perspective into classroom instruction through a focus on international themes (see Cates 2000, Dyer and Bushell, 1996). In fact, this paper not only aims at introducing the reasons for introducing global issues as an important theme to English textbook development, but also attempts to highlight the applications of GI for English language classrooms with a specific reference to the Iranian society as an EFL context.

Index Terms—global issues, textbook development, English language teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

As criticisms spread on English language teaching, materials, as the heart of educational setting also have gone under a critical appraisal. Many applied linguists question the content of mainstream materials in ELT world (Rashidi, and Safari, 2011). Findings show that the majority of coursebooks used for English instruction are politically and socially harmless for an international audience. Most publishers advise coursebook writers to follow a set of guidelines to make sure that controversial topics are kept out of their books.

As a result, most coursebooks deal with neutral, apparently harmless topics (such as food, shopping, or travel) instead of dealing with real issues such as the thinning of the ozone layer, nuclear waste disposal, the spread of AIDS, ecological disaster and etc., while recent years have seen an explosion of interest in global issues and global education by the international English teaching profession. This can be documented in the journals and conference programs of international English teaching organizations such as TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) and IATEFL (the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language).

On the other side, Brinton, et. al. (1989) and Mohan (1986) emphasize on language as a means of learning about the world and recommend the use of motivating themes and authentic materials in classroom teaching. So, the implication here is that we can't call our English teaching successful if our students, however fluent, are ignorant of world problems, have no social conscience or use their communication skills for international crime, exploitation, oppression or environmental destruction.

Due to the importance of this new approach, global issues , in the field of EFL, and the necessity of paying attention to the global issues in language teaching for making students more aware of the world problems from one side and the rapid growth of English textbooks from the Inner Circle countries without considering the needs and culture of learners in Outer Circle countries and Expanding Circle countries from the other side (see, Davari, et. al., 2012), this research attempts to express the reasons for introducing global issues as an important theme to English textbook development and highlighting its applications for English language classrooms.

II. GLOBAL ISSUES

Global issues have been referred to as 'issues of global significance' (Anderson, 1996), or as 'problems in the world' (Mark, 1993). According to Pike and Selby (1988, p. 22), a global issue is 'a contemporary phenomenon affecting the lives of people and/or the health of the planet in a harmful or potentially harmful way'.

As the traditional forms of language teaching is being replaced with more communicative trends and grammar-based, rule-governed approaches yielded to contextual language instruction, it becomes possible for learners to interact, share ideas, develop language and social skills as well as gain social and language awareness. This relatively recent movement towards socially responsible teaching has encouraged language educators to use global issues as a context to develop language and social skills.

It is emphasized that global issues should be incorporated in ELT. In Sampedro and Hillyard's (2004) terms, global issues can no longer be dismissed as the "out there", but they are very much "in here" too and can no longer be safely ignored.

Global issues can be included in teaching content even when students are just starting to learn the sounds of the foreign language. One example is the Japanese junior high school EFL text Cosmos English Course (Oura et al. 1989), which teaches the sounds of English by using the example word "peace" to teach the English sound /p/. Grammar can also be taught with a global perspective through a change of content. Some innovative teachers have designed exercises to teach students the conditional "if…then" while promoting environmental awareness. These efforts revolve around pattern practice based on model sentences such as "If we all recycled paper, we'd save more trees".

It is possible to integrate four language skills, reading, writing, listening, and speaking, with global issues content. One British English instructor, for example, has based a complete English four-skill lesson on the international human rights organization, Amnesty International (Sandilands, 1989).

As language teachers, we live in critical times. Our world faces serious global issues of terrorism, ethnic conflict, social inequality, and environmental destruction. Cates (1990) concerns with the fact that our planet faces serious "global issues" or world problems and in this relation, Kniep (1987, p. 184) points out: "Hardly a day goes by without an announcement of terrorist activities, the newest lake poisoned by acid rain, the latest energy crisis, the suffering of displaced people in refugee camps or the repression through violent means of people seeking their human rights" So we need to prepare our students to cope with these problems. It is our responsibility as language teachers to take an action in a world of war, poverty, prejudice, and pollution.

"Global education", as a new approach to language teaching, attempts to find solutions to the problems. It aims to enable students to effectively acquire a foreign language while empowering them with the knowledge, skills, and commitment required by world citizens to solve global problems (Cates, 1990). Global education has been also defined as "education which promotes the knowledge, attitudes and skills relevant to living responsibly in a multicultural and interdependent world" (Fisher and Hicks 1985).

As Kniep (1985) states, global education consists of efforts to bring about changes in the content, methods and social context of education in order to better prepare students for citizenship in a global age. Matsuda (2006) points out since at present learners want to become effective users of English in the international context, some awareness of global cultures and issues needs to be fostered. In her words, such topics as world peace, environmental conservation and other relevant topics in the field of global education provide appropriate content for readings, class discussions and course assignments.

A trend related to the growing interest in global education concerns the efforts by English teaching associations to reach out to global issue experts and organizations for ideas, stimulation and resources (Cates, 2000). Recently, Common European Framework (CEF) which provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe, suggests ''thinking globally and acting locally'' in the perspective of preparing the students for a changing world.

CEF mainly aims to promote the national and international institutions engaged in the development of methods of teaching and evaluation in the field of modern language learning and in the production and use of materials. In this way, all aspects of language learning, teaching and research can be covered by basic characteristics of global education.

III. CURRENT TEXTBOOKS

According to Bardovi-Harling (1996), teaching materials are perceived as a prestige source of input and play an important part in curriculum design of a foreign language class, because learners especially in EFL contexts do not receive much input outside the classroom.

Most of ELT materials are a compilation of information and activities with the purpose of improving English communicative abilities regardless of the social issues while the major mission of ELT materials should be to contribute students read their world while read their word (Rashidi, and Safari, 2011).

As Hillyard (2005) points out, the topics of most current textbooks are with themes such as the family, sport, hobbies, travel, pop culture, festivals from remote countries, which bear no impact on students' lives and this point is supported by Leather' (2003) word that textbooks produced for an international audience are bland and , to put it simply, boring.

According to Banegas (2010), such coursebooks are criticized not only for avoiding provoking topics, but also for presenting a romantic view of countries such as Britain or the USA. In his words, in an attempt to avoid some controversial and real issues, material writers opt for selecting themes that are rooted in the British or American culture.

Akbari (2008) states that one of the reasons of producing such textbooks is to make sure they do not lose their market potential and in this process most of the topics of interest for a critical pedagogy are removed. In his terms, most of the topics one encounters in commercially prepared textbooks deal with harmless issues such as travel, shopping, holidays

and food recipes, leaving little room for social transformation and political awareness rising. Hillyard (2005) points out that when we study the topics of such textbooks, there is little controversial material.

A problem of commercially produced coursebooks is their disregard for the localness of learning and learning needs. Most such books make use of a language which is considered to be aspirational (Gray 2001), where most of the language introduced deals with the needs and concerns of middle and upper classes; in most of the dialogues of such books the interlocutors talk about issues which are far removed from the lives of many learners.

IV. TEXTBOOK DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL ISSUES

Hutchinson and Torres (1994) suggest that the textbook is an almost universal element of teaching. While millions of copies are sold every year, and numerous aid projects have been set up to produce them in different countries, no teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook. So the textbook is an important means of satisfying the range of needs that emerge from the classroom and its wider context.

On the other hand, while ELT materials play a very important role in many language classrooms, in recent years there has been a lot of debate throughout the ELT profession on the actual role of materials in teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language (TESL/TEFL). A growing number of educators are proposing world problems or "global issues" as subject matter in ELT materials which can both meet the need for more meaningful content, and address the lack of educational relevance of much of the general English education in schools around the world. In the following, some points which are considered important in using global issues in textbook development are introduced.

The first point concerns the content of the textbooks. We can't call our English teaching successful if our students, however fluent, are ignorant of world problems, have no social conscience or use their communication skills for international crime, exploitation, oppression or environmental destruction. In this respect, different educators claim that the foreign language classroom is the right place for global education while materials with related content are used (Starkey, 1988, 2000; Maley, 1992, cited in Cates 2000; Mark, 1993; Dyer and Bushell 1996; Cates, 2000; Jacobs and Goatly, 2000).

Secondly, the source of the themes of the materials should be derived from the learners' life situations, needs and interests. In this relation, the best way to achieve a global perspective in the foreign language classroom is through a learner-centered syllabus based on the students' needs. It is essential to note that the term 'interest' has a different sense. Here, interests may initially not attract students' attention. The criterion for the selection of themes in critical pedagogy is the problematic reality in the learners' lives (Crawford, 1978).

Making students encouraged to use their English to clarify and express their values, to think and speak critically about world issues is the third point that should be considered. In this relation, Horstein (1990), & Stempleski (1993) believe that values-oriented education seems best implemented by learner-centered pedagogy that encourages students to take responsibility for their learning, to learn cooperatively in pairs and small groups, and to make connections between the classroom lesson and their own lives.

The fourth point is that there should be a kind of change in different fields of language learning and teaching. Recently, there is a movement in Europe in providing a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. The institution suggests ''thinking globally and acting locally'' in the perspective of preparing the students for a changing world (Çavdar, 2006). In this way, both global issues and cultural aspects of source languages in the development of methods of teaching and evaluation in the field of modern language learning and in the production and use of materials are considered.

The foreign language classroom and a meeting point between at least two languages and cultures is the fifth point worth mentioning because this is already a step towards a global perspective. Prodromou (1988) and Alptekin (1993) suggest that it is not really possible to teach a language without embedding it in its cultural base. In this regard, Gary (2002) argues, learners will improve their language skills by using their textbooks as useful instruments for provoking discussion, cultural debate, and a two-way flow of information. Moreover, recent authors have criticized textbooks for their inherent social and cultural biases. With the spread of English around the world, there is no longer the need for students to assimilate into Anglo-American culture. Bringing source culture, i.e. learners' own culture, into materials content is valuable since focusing on local cultures contributes to learners to reflect on the positive and negative features of their own culture and consequently explore ways to make changes in the society if change is required (Akbari, 2008).

V. GLOBAL ISSUES IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Language classroom is a place where the goals of language teaching and learning can be seen, so the process of language education, teaching methods, textbooks and some other factors take roles in making a class successful in preparing learners to become not only fluent in language skills, but familiar with the world problems. But it is a question how to bring real world in the classroom! Due to the flexibility of language, EFL instructors around the world integrate global issues and global education into their teaching in a variety of ways that involve language- teaching content, methods, materials, course design, teacher training, and extracurricular activities(Cates, 2000)

On the other side, critical pedagogy in ELT as an approach to language education places sociopolitical considerations high on the classroom agenda and incorporates a set of principles and practices. Thus, the aim is "not only to change the nature of schooling, but also the wider society" (Pennycook, 1990, p. 24).

The relation between global issues and language teaching is highly considered by an organization such as UNESCO. It recommends international cooperation through classroom cooperation using language-teaching approaches responsive to students' interests and needs.

As Cates (2000, p. 241) states, a global education approach in foreign language teaching involves 'integrating a global perspective into classroom instruction through a focus on international themes, lessons built around global issues, classroom activities linking students to the wider world and concepts such as social responsibility and world citizenship'.

Global education is as much a matter of how we teach as of what we teach (Cates, 2000). For many teachers, this involves a shift from passive to active learning, from teacher- to student-centered classes, from language as structure to language for communication about the world. This shift in teaching method often stimulates instructors to experiment with new approaches such as experiential learning. This can lead to trying out class simulations and role-plays that get students out of their seats and actively involved in exploring global issues in the foreign language. Some teachers try to bring the world into the classroom by inviting native guest speakers to promote communicative English skills as well as interest in world cultures and global issues.

In sum, paying attention to the content of materials in class, socially and culturally, choosing active teaching methods with the emphasis on student – oriented class, using language-teaching approaches responsive to students' needs and focusing on international themes are among the best recommendations that help integrate global issues into classroom.

VI. CONCLUSION

Today, on the one hand, global issues, known as a well-established branch of language teaching field in general and English language teaching in particular, has gained increasing interest among the teaching community. On the other hand, we live in a world that faces serious global issues such as terrorism, racism, pollution, ethnic conflict, poverty, etc. So, due to the importance of textbooks in any ELT context, it is necessary to consider all aspects of global issues not only in materials development, but also in course design and methods of teaching.

Reviewing the current ELT textbooks taught in Iranian society, as the main reference of this study, reveals that most of the topics in these books are either Center-oriented or sanitized. Thus, avoiding such topics, enjoying this new approach, namely global issues, in ELT textbook development can be known as a panacea for the cultural and linguistic imperialism of such textbooks.

Pass all doubt, the Iranian society, as one which English is taught as a foreign language, and as a consequence, the textbooks play important role can enjoy this new approach in ELT textbook development as an efficient way to minimize the cultural impacts of Center-oriented ELT textbooks and also make the Iranian EFL learners aware with the latest global concerns and issues. In a more specific word, using this approach in ELT textbook development and ELT English classrooms may pave the way to provide a situation in which a shift from passive to active learning, from teacher- to student-centered classes, from language as structure to language for communication about the world is formed.

To sum up, in a globalizing world, learning a language especially English which is known as a global and international language is an inevitable reality, so providing textbooks based on global issues not only enables learners to efficiently acquire and use a foreign language, but also empowers them with the knowledge, skills and commitment required by world citizens for the solution of global problems. In fact, enjoying this approach, not only provides an opportunity for the learners to transform their lives, but it can create a situation in which the learners turn to effective users of global English in global contexts.

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