

# CRITICAL REFLECTION ON CLT APPLICATION IN INDONESIA

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## **Abstract**

There has been a social turn in current foreign language education in general and communicative language teaching (CLT) in particular. For many people, CLT might be regarded as a way to facilitate the target learners to acquire and employ the target language communicatively. Despite all CLT's favourable characteristics and the fact that it captures the fundamental nature of language use for communicative situations of everyday life, its implementation in Indonesian contexts has not been without problems. This is due to the fact that many people in Indonesia might still have different interpretation of applying CLT in the classroom setting.

**Key words:** reflection, communicative, language, teaching, Indonesia

There has been a social turn in current foreign language education in general and communicative language teaching (CLT) in particular. For many people, CLT might be regarded as a way to facilitate the target learners to acquire and employ the target language communicatively. Despite all CLT's favourable characteristics and the fact that it captures the fundamental nature of language use for communicative situations of everyday life, its implementation in Indonesian contexts has not been without problems. This is due to the fact that many people in Indonesia might still have different interpretation of applying CLT in the classroom setting. Indeed, CLT might be interpreted differently<sup>1</sup>, it depends on the background knowledge of the people.

This paper will examine the appropriateness of communicative language teaching to meet the needs of learners in Indonesia. At the beginning, there will be a short explanation of CLT concept. The second part will present a brief overview of the practices of CLT in Indonesia. The discussion, then, moves on to spell out the challenges faced by the learner as well as the teachers when CLT is used in the teaching and the learning process. The final part will offer a conclusion and two constructive suggestions of how to match CLT to

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<sup>1</sup> Harmer, J. *The practice of English language teaching*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). (UK: Longman, 2007), p. 69

meet the needs of learners in order to use the language communicatively.

The use of CLT in the classroom is to advocate learning through communication<sup>2</sup>. For the CLT methodology, teachers are generally provided with a repertoire of communicative activities in their selection of teaching skills. On the other hand, learners are given opportunities to practice the language skills in the classroom. Learners, as the centre of the teaching-learning process are encouraged to use language in order to communicate with others, compared to just doing the speaking and writing for the purpose of practicing the language. This view suggests that a learner who interacts mainly with other learners in the group and learns through cooperation with other learners<sup>3</sup> and engages in negotiating meaning may help the learner to acquire the target language.

In Indonesia, the concept of CLT has been fully promoted and indeed its application has been encouraged to be used in most of language classrooms in order to achieve communicative competence. In the actual application of CLT, however, both teachers and students still find some problems. Musthafa<sup>4</sup> states that CLT in Indonesia has not been applied successfully in enabling students to be more competent in using English for real-life purposes. In general, the failure might happen because most of Indonesian still employ the culture which favors a dominant role for the teacher and expect the students to be docile and passive in the classroom. Such a culture may rather find the grammar-translation method more favorable for its language classrooms. In all, such situations may hinder learning instead of promoting language learning, and indeed might make the teachers and the learners reject the application of CLT in the classroom.

There are many challenges faced by both learners and teachers in the Indonesia with regard to the application of CLT in language learning. Apart from other challenges, such as the teacher's degree of confidence in using the language and time constraints, probably the essential problems in its implementation in Indonesia are: firstly, the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Richards, J. C. & T. S. Rodgers. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge UP, 2001), p.166

<sup>4</sup> Musthafa, B. (2001). Communicative language teaching in Indonesia: Issues of theoretical assumptions and challenges in the classroom practice. *Journal of Southeast Asia Education*. 2 (2), 1-10.



English National Final Examination does not highlight CLT, and secondly, the conflict with the local culture of learning which covers the framework of expectations, attitudes, values, and beliefs about what constitute good learning, and about how to teach or learn<sup>5</sup>.

A major challenge when applying CLT in Indonesia is closely related to the local culture of learning, which is a culture of high student anxiety. It is derived from the cultural heritage, and it is well accepted by most of the community as a cultural norm. Generally, Indonesians think that being expressive in public is considered arrogant, while making a mistake in public is shameful. Families generally shape and train their children in such thinking and this is encouraged to be applied in their daily lives in order to be accepted within the community. In fact this way of thinking ability links to Sheldon and Johnson's<sup>6</sup> statement that "when we learn language we are taught how to use it in ways that up-hold a preferred social order".

In relation to the CLT classroom in which teachers just become the facilitator of the learning, and let the students become "negotiator- between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning- emerges from and interacts with the role of joint negotiator within the group and within the classroom procedures and activities which the group undertakes"<sup>7</sup>. Such culture of high student anxiety will not support CLT<sup>8</sup>, this is due to notion that students have less desire to speak<sup>9</sup>. In fact, it might adversely affect students' behaviours, for example: students might be reluctant to express their ideas on the topic or the issue being discussed; students might prefer to be passive because of being afraid of making mistakes; and students might prefer a teacher-centered class. These behaviours might not

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<sup>5</sup> Tudor, I. (1996). *Learner-centredness as Language Education*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 129

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Sheldon, A. & Johnson, D. (1998). Preschool negotiators: linguistic differences in how girls and boys regulate the expression of dissent in same-sex groups. In P. Trudgill & J. Cheshire. (Eds), *The Sociolinguistics Reader, Gender and Discourse*, (2), 76-98.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Breen, M.P. & Candlin, C. (2001). 'The Essentials of a Communicative Curriculum in Language Teaching'. In Hall, D.R. & Hewings, A. (eds.) *Innovation in English Language Teaching*. London: Routledge. 9-26.

<sup>8</sup> Patil, Z. N. (2008). Rethinking the objective of teaching English in Asia. *The Asian EFL Journal Quarterly*, 10(4), 227-240.

<sup>9</sup> Harmer, *op.cit.*, p. 69

build communicative competence; rather hinder communicative competence<sup>10</sup>.

Another challenge faced by both students and teachers is that the English National Final Examination does not highlight communicative competence. This is due to the notion that such examination "is commonly dominated by questions which are form-focused and presented in a multiple-choice format, which does not allow divergent thinking"<sup>11</sup>. Implicitly, this might turn the teaching and the learning process into rote learning, in which students are encouraged to complete exercises, such as completing text books exercises. Indeed, for the majority of the teachers, they believe that this way of teaching might help the learners to practice and understand the nature of such examination. On the other hand, the learners might feel secure of this early practice test during the class because it might help them to work out the examination.

For most of the teachers, the difficulty of applying CLT in the classroom might lie in changing the interest focus of the students to learn the language, which is merely learning to pass national final examination. This condition might create less communication in the teaching and learning process, which opposes the concept of CLT, which emphasis on "a desire to communicate"<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, such classroom condition might provide very little exposure to real-life English usage or even create fear to communicate the target language and add to students' natural anxiety. Patil<sup>13</sup> states that the fear complex will increase as a result of learning which has a great emphasis on rote learning and an examination that test memory rather than understanding the use of the language for the real life situations.

To sum up, communicative competence is the enabling force for successful communication in both formal and mundane situations. Language is the medium, in all its forms, through which this communicative ability is manifested, thus the aim of language teaching should be to develop communicative competence. CLT is the methodology which aims at developing communicative competence. Generally, in its implementation in Indonesian classrooms, however, CLT has been revealed that it is at conflict with the local cultures of learning and testing service which does not include communicative

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>11</sup> Cited in Musthafa, *op.cit.*, p. 6

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Harmer, *op.cit.*, p. 70

<sup>13</sup> Patil, *op.cit.*, p. 227



tests. Those factors, however, cannot be a justification for abandoning CLT.

There are two ways to deal with the problems: firstly, it might be a good idea to include oral or speaking tests in the National Final Examination. Secondly, it is useful to conduct a needs analysis to gather information about the beliefs, attitude and views of the learners and teachers towards CLT. This information can also be helpful in attuning CLT to the local culture of learning and the National Education Authority's policies if it is found to be conflicting with them.

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