# Social Interactions in Indonesian for Speakers of Other Languages Classes

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Abstract:     Language serves a primary function as a tool for social communication and interaction. Therefore, language learning should not only focus on the language forms, but also the opportunity to use the knowledge in various social contexts. This study aimed at investigating the teachers' beliefs and practices regarding communicative language teaching (CLT) in their classrooms. This small-scaled investigation exploited the benefit of technology to gather responses from nine teachers in a language centre via online questionnaires and interview. The findings showed that the teacher' beliefs and practices were constructed by teachers' understanding of CLT principles. Albeit contextual constraints, they attempted to frequently stimulate the students' communication skills by providing opportunities for teacher-student and peer interactions in the target language in the classrooms through ranges of classroom activities. This research demonstrates that the alignment of curriculum, facilities, teachers' cognition and students' participant is likely to contribute to the implementation of CLT in Indonesian for Speakers of Other Languages classes.

## 1   INTRODUCTION

Language is best acquired when it is used for its main purpose: communication (Krashen, 2009; Richards, 2006). The emergence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in the 1960s marked the shift of language learning paradigm. Language is not only acquired through a series of exposure to the linguistic system, but also through various opportunities to actively use the target language in the classroom. Indeed, the crux of CLT is social interactions (Savignon, 2007). Investigations of interactions in various English as a second language (ESL) and foreign language (EFL) classrooms generally show that interactions in various social contexts extend language learning (Seo and Kim, 2011; Shehadeh, 2011). Likewise, students had positive view on the interactive classroom activities (Savignon and Wang, 2003).

The social spirit of language learning subsequently affected language learning policy across the globe, not to mention in Asian countries. In Indonesia, the installment of CLT approach in English curriculum has started since 1984 (Musthafa, 2001). Despite the popularity, CLT

raises some debates. This is because as an approach, CLT is flexible that it does not refer to acquiring specific language skills or utilizing an exclusive set of teaching method. It is the language teacher beliefs, knowledge, and thought systems that underlay their pedagogical decisions (Borg, 2006). Abundant research have involved teachers because of their understanding of the learners' needs (Holliday, 1994; Savignon, 2007).

Surprisingly, despite the teachers' approval on the approach, teachers stated that there were contextual constraints that limit their pedagogical practice (Farooq, 2010; Hiep, 2007; Karim, 2004; Mowlaie and Rahimi, 2010; Nishino, 2008; Sholihah, 2012). These constraints were inaccessible authentic materials, classroom size and hours, limited teacher expertise in applying the approach, traditional assessment and students' low level of the target language.

Presented these realities, the current research aimed to balance the investigation by providing insight from the Indonesian for Speakers of Other Languages (ISOL) classrooms context. Indonesian language is currently a popular foreign language learned across the globe. Some research on CLT in ISOL classrooms concentrated on creating integrated

and interactive teaching materials to promote students' communicative competence (Arumdyahsari, Widodo and Susanto, 2016; Jazeri, 2016; Oktriono, Ningsih and Pedo, 2017; Ulumuddin and Ismanto, 2014; Siroj, 2015). While, Waenawae and Suyata (2015) focused on comparing the effectiveness of role play method and the group discussion method in improving the Indonesian speaking skill of the students of Thammasat University, Thailand. Sopiah (2015) also pointed that Communicative Language Teaching was effective to improve a Korean student's writing. Nevertheless, none of these researches looked into teachers' perspective on the imported approach. Therefore, it is necessary to shed light on the ISOL teachers' perspective. The next section will describe the method of this research.

## 2 METHODS

This research used a qualitative methodology including online questionnaire and interviews to explore the ISOL teacher's CLT beliefs and classroom practices in a language centre in Bandung, Indonesia. The language centre offers private and regular classes as well as ICT programs and scholarship programs, namely *Darmasiswa* and *Kemitraan Negara Berkembang* for foreign students from countries which have diplomatic relationship with Indonesia to study Indonesian language and language preparation for students from developing countries to get their master degree in Indonesian universities, respectively.

The participants were nine ISOL teachers. To gather their perspective and teaching practices, an online open-ended questionnaire was formulated in Google Forms application and distributed via email. These data were complemented by audio-recorded, semi structured interviews with the teachers of approximately 20 minutes. These interviews queried the obstacles they encountered in the classroom (i.e., What is your role in the classroom? What teaching materials do you use and how to access them? What are the obstacles you encounter in the teaching process?).

The data were analyzed inductively (Creswell, 2012) and resulted in two groups: the first group who incorporated social interactions to extend the four language skills (n=3) and the second group who focused merely on speaking skill (n=6). Teacher interviews were coded line by line and compared to the results of the previous studies to capture the contextual constraints they encountered.

## 3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 The Language Centre

The students learning Indonesian language in the language centre represented almost all the continents. Therefore, a classroom was likely to be rich in cultural and first language background.

The curriculum used in the language centre gave equal emphasise to the four language skills, i.e., listening, reading, writing and speaking. Each level of a program was designed to be completed in 30 hours. The duration for each class was mostly 2 hours, except in the ICT and scholarship programs in which students had a 2.5 hour-meeting. The main learning material was the module written by a team of instructors. However, teachers were encouraged to modify and use supplementary materials that are suitable to the learners' need and lesson.

Throughout the programs, students were given two tests to track their learning progress. The tests assessed the students' language skills in four areas, i.e., listening, reading, writing and speaking, just as reflected in the curriculum. However, students in private program were opted not to take any test because some did not concern on their learning progress while some thought that the test reduced their class hours.

### 3.2 Classroom Social Interactions: Teacher Beliefs, Roles and Practice

The questionnaire reveals that the teachers favoured CLT and attempted to apply it regularly. Each group's beliefs toward the communicative competence and their teaching approach as well as the subsequent language skills they concentrate on are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Teachers' beliefs in CLT in ISOL classrooms.

| Group | Communicative competence belief | Approach | Skill |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | The ability to convey idea orally and in written as well as verbally and non-verbally on various contexts which appropriate culturally and linguistically. | - CLT and text-based<br>- CLT and conventional method | All |
| 2 | The ability to exchange information | CLT | Speaking |

As found in Table 1, the two-group held an opposing view towards communicative competence

and had different instructional decisions. The first group. who viewed communicative competence as the ability to deliver a linguistic and culture appropriate idea, both orally and in written, has been integrating CLT with the text-based approach and conventional approach where teachers do most of the talk. This group also has been giving a balanced emphasize towards the four language skills. Conversely, the second group, who viewed communicative competence as the ability to obtain from and give information to various sources, did not integrate another teaching approach. They also highlighted only speaking skill.

This finding shows that ISOL teachers' instructional practice is shaped by their understanding of the communicative competence (Holliday, 1994). The first group who allows students to engage in reading, writing and listening activities as much as they do in the speaking activities, believe that the Indonesian language skill is beneficial in order to participate in the society. In fact, they believe that a good language command might affect the success at work, school and relationship. On the other hand, the second group seems to have a partial interpretation of communicative competence proposed by Richards (2006).

Despite their opposing belief, the teachers encouraged students, regardless their current language ability, to actively use the target language in the classroom interactions. As summarized in Figure 1, teachers created venue for social interactions through different classroom activities. They did not favour a certain activity over others, but they creatively selected the activity according to the learners' need and the objective of the lesson. Indeed, the objective of communicative approach relies on the learner need in a given context (Savignon, 2007).
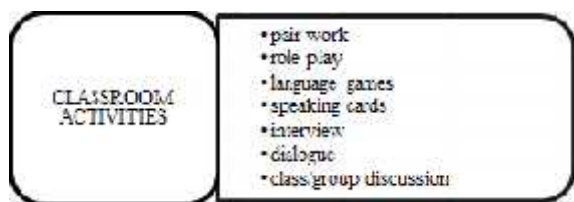


Figure 1: Venues for classroom social interactions.

Throughout the activities, the teachers played multiple roles. At the initial stage, they gave instruction. During the activities, they mainly withdrew their active participation but facilitated students with guidance and response should there

were any conflict, misunderstanding or question. They also provided feedback and correction. At all stages, they promoted target language use.

Although the participants generally believed in the students' involvement in peer interactions, they also provided rooms for teacher-students interactions. They admitted to review the previous lessons, check students' understanding, summarize the lessons and correct students' pronunciation. Also, they occasionally created non-formal conversation to extend social interaction and involved in the classroom discussion. Lastly, a participant actively engaged in interpreting and negotiating meaning of various texts.

The finding on the participants' multiple roles in CLT classroom reflects their understanding on CLT principles. Teachers are organizers who organize classroom activities and materials, facilitators who facilitate the classroom elements' interaction, independent participants who monitors and pay attention to errors during the interaction, and sources who answers questions (Sholihah, 2012).

It can be concluded that the ISOL teachers' beliefs about communicative competence shapes the teaching approach they employ in the classroom and the language skills they focus on. The roles they take in the classroom and consideration in selecting classroom activities reflect their understanding on the CLT principles.

## 3.3 Classroom Social Interactions: Contextual Constraints

A follow-up interview disclosed the obstacles in implementing the CLT approach in ISOL classrooms. Some contextual constraints, such as class size and hours did not hinder the participants from creating communicative activities. This is the case because the class size was no more than 10 students. The teacher also said that the duration of each lesson was sufficient for the students to engage in various social interactions. This classroom condition aligns with the "learning group ideal" highlighted by Holliday (1994) in which a classroom has fifteen or fewer students and promotes group practice and teacher's control over the students' utterance and writing. This condition is ideal for foreign language learners to extend their communicative competence via various social interactions.

The teachers further expressed their appreciation for the curriculum which resonate their teaching beliefs on language learning. Likewise, because the curriculum advocated in the language centre

highlight the development of all the language skills, the teachers felt that they were guided to design classroom practice accordingly. The form of assessment also measured the four skills' development, hence it resonates the CLT principle. Teacher felt that they actually tested the materials covered in the class.

This condition reflects a top-down and comprehensive implementation of social spirit in ISOL. The course program design, classroom practice and assessment in the language centre adhere to the principles of CLT. The alignment of the language learning objectives and curriculum is the most important pillar to extend the communicative competence of students (Farooq, 2015; Nishino, 2008).

Another obstacle in CLT implementation was the students' characteristics. Hiep (2007) assumed that a classroom with which students do not share a mother tongue or be able to speak their mother tongue outside the classroom might actively participate in the classroom interaction, hence extend their language competence in the target language. The participants, though, put forward a rather contradictory deduction. They claimed that some students actually refused to participate or proposed a rather "non-communicative" classroom activity. It is due to the fact that an ISOL classroom consisted of students from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds that it is their perception of learning at their home countries that contributes to their willingness to participate. Also, despite the various sources of Indonesian language outside the classroom, the participants claimed that it did not directly affect their students' communicative competence. They believed that the students' characteristic and autonomy in language learning that contribute to their communicative competence. In fact, the essence of the communicative approach centres at learners' autonomy in their learning (Ariatna, 2016; Farooq, 2015; Holliday, 1994; Richards, 2006; Savignon and Wang, 2003). Also, the participants did not find students' low level of Indonesian as a challenge to the classroom activities as contrast to one of the participants' views of study in Taif language centre (Farooq, 2015).

Teachers participated in studies on CLT implementation in ESL or EFL contexts complained about the limited access to the authentic materials restricted their pedagogical practices (Hiep, 2007; Karim, 2004; Nishino, 2008; Sholihah, 2012). Interestingly, the participants of this study admitted that the reference books and ready-to-use supplementary materials for ISOL context were scarce. They adapted materials from EFL activity books or teaching material source websites. There was a handful amount of authentic materials, for example newspaper and news excerpts, short stories, novels or poems, but they were not necessarily suitable for pedagogic activities. The participants, hence, needed to modify the authentic materials to make them suitable to the students' level or objective of the lesson.

The aforementioned findings lead the discussion to the teachers' expertise in promoting students' social interactions in language classroom. Studies across EFL contexts highlighted the limited teacher expertise of the CLT implementation (Farooq, 2015; Hiep, 2007; Karim, 2004; Mowlaie and Rahimi, 2010; Nishino, 2008; Sholihah, 2012). Whereas, the teachers participated in this study were confident about their pedagogical practices. They were aware of their significant role and the challenges but managed to overcome the difficulties. They accentuated the teachers' ability to recognize the learners' needs and characteristic as well as the teachers' creativity to rigorously plan, prepare, and execute the activities and modify teaching materials.

So, the social approach to ISOL learning concentrates at the dynamic relationship among the curriculum, classroom practice, assessment, teaching facilities, students and teachers.

# 4 CONCLUSIONS

The present study delineated the ISOL teachers' belief and practices of CLT in a university language centre. The participants are well aware of the contextual constraints but are willing to overcome the obstructions. The dynamic interconnection among the stakeholders, i.e. the curriculum, teaching facilities, students and teachers, plays a significant role to support the implementation of communicative approach in language learning. Teachers ought to acknowldegde their own significant role in order to function pertinently as the theory builder and practitioners. Likewise, they need to preserve and develop their personal and professional growth in order to comply with the dynamic growth of learners' needs and language development. Nevertheless, administrative support is highly important to encourage the students' communicative competence. All in all, the centre of communicative approach in ISOL classrooms is the alignment of curriculum, teaching facilities, teachers' cognition, and students' participation.

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