Why Communicative Approach Culturally Fails in Indonesia

Ketidakberhasilan Pendekatan Komunikatif secara Budaya di Indonesia

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Keywords	Abstract
communicative approach; communicative language teaching; culture; English; Indonesia.	For decades, the Indonesian government has tried to catch up with the development of English language teaching worldwide. This paper discusses the implementation of the communicative approach (CA) and why it is culturally incompatible in Indonesia. Having done library research, the writers first discuss the status of English language teaching in Indonesia and the development of communicative language teaching (CLT) in the world. The discussion then shifts to cultural issues hindering the implementation of CLT in Indonesia. Here, instead of suggesting major changes, the writers recommend that CLT be culturally adjusted, and English teachers who play an important role in the classroom must be able to tinker with their methods to make them appropriate to the local cultural norms. There is a pressing need to redefine the current teacher-student relationship to keep up with the prevailing cultural norms. The teachers should incorporate more student-centered activities in the classroom.

Kata kunci	Abstrak
pendekatan komunikatif; pengajaran bahasa komunikatif; budaya; bahasa Inggris; Indonesia.	Pemerintah Indonesia telah berusaha mengejar ketertinggalannya di bidang pengajaran bahasa Inggris. Makalah ini membahas kegagalan implementasi pendekatan komunikatif (CA) karena tidak sesuai dengan budaya di Indonesia. Pertama-tama, akan dibahas status bahasa Inggris di Indonesia dan perkembangan pengajaran bahasa komunikatif (CLT) di dunia. Kemudian, diskusi beralih ke isu-isu budaya yang menghambat implementasi CLT di Indonesia. Di sini, alih-alih menyarankan perubahan besar, direkomendasikan agar CLT disesuaikan dengan *setting* budaya setempat, dan guru bahasa Inggris yang memainkan peran penting di dalam kelas harus dapat menyesuaikan metode tersebut dengan norma-norma budaya setempat. Mereka harus dapat mendefinisikan kembali hubungan guru-siswa sesuai dengan norma-norma budaya yang selama ini dipegang teguh tertanam. Para guru juga sebaiknya memasukkan kegiatan yang berfokus pada siswa di kelas mereka.

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A. Introduction

For decades, the Indonesian government has struggled to pinpoint the most appropriate curriculum to help students fully participate in and benefit from national development. Chief among the efforts that have been made is the inclusion of English as the first foreign language as a mandatory subject for students in the secondary level and students in the first two years at the tertiary level. In addition, some primary schools include English as a formal part of their curriculum and an informal element of the kindergarten curriculum in some major cities. It is hoped that the inclusion of English teaching in the Indonesian educational system will help produce competent English users who can apply their acquired knowledge and keep abreast of global scientific and technological advancement (Masduqi & Subiyanto, 2020; Sukono, 2004)

In Indonesia's context of English as a foreign language, the curriculum developers have stipulated the use of communicative language teaching (CLT) at all levels of education since 1994. This policy is adopted in response to the need for communicatively competent graduates (Ariatna, 2016; Musthafa, 2001). However, despite the change in approach, most English teachers' focus has remained the same. English teaching has mostly been concerned with language structures, reading passages, overly technical vocabulary, and other activities that are far from being communicative. The facts show the discrepancies between the principles of the communicative approach and the actual implementation in classrooms. We believe these discrepancies are due to many factors.

Culture stands out as the dominant factor hindering the effectiveness of CLT in Indonesia. Culture can potentially affect the classroom teaching-learning process since culture embeds and shapes pedagogy. Therefore, different cultures value different teaching and learning behaviors. Hall et al. (2013) argue that culture is related to the way of life of a people, a particular community or even a nation. Language, on the other hand, is a way of practicing culture. Language and culture are, therefore, interrelated and inseparable (Gűrsoy & Kunt, 2019; McDevitt, 2004; Zacharias, 2014)

Language as a social practice is bound by the shared cultural values within a particular society. It is valued through the appropriateness of the linguistic context, word choice, and the linguistic behavior that we show and perpetuate. Every society has its own set of rules about how people should express their feelings and ideas, what is considered appropriate and inappropriate topics of conversation, and what behaviors are expected within that community (Hall et al., 2013; Masduqi et al., 2023)

This article discusses cultural reasons why implementing CLT in teaching English in Indonesia is ineffective. The article begins with the status of English in Indonesia, followed by CLT and Western language teaching. The article then discusses the cultural issues that hinder the implementation of CLT in Indonesia. This part focuses on teachers' and students' roles in the classroom and the roles of society, which are underpinned by their beliefs and values. Finally, this article suggests some recommendations to overcome these cultural issues and make teaching English in Indonesia more communicative.

B. Method

This study is qualitative, and the writers collected and analyzed categorical data to comprehend concepts, opinions, or experiences and to get insights into a research problem or create new ideas for research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Chotib et al., 2023; Cohen et al., 2017; Given, 2008). It is based on the library research method. Following Mann's library research models, the writers did 'keyword searches in online and print sources, subject searches in online and print sources, citation searches in printed sources, and searches through people sources' focusing on the communicative approach, communicative language teaching, English language teaching in Indonesia, and culture in Indonesia on Google Scholar (NYU Libraries, 2024).

After collecting the sources, the writers decided to obtain an expert opinion to help justify the relevance of the sources. Here, the first writer conducted an interview with a senior expert whose doctoral dissertation was on curricula and communicative language teaching in Indonesia. The expert has taught English and research courses at the university level for thirty years and published journal articles/conference papers on communicative language teaching in Indonesia. Based on the expert's recommendation, the writers purposively selected, analyzed, and discussed the sources which focused on the four following aspects, i.e., status of English in Indonesia, CLT and Western learning culture, cultural issues hindering the implementation of CLT in Indonesia, and recommendations to make CLT effective (Masduqi, 2024).

C. Results and Discussion

1. Status of English in Indonesia

The current status of English in Indonesia is indispensable since it has a strong impact on education and affects how people appreciate this language's use in their daily lives. Since Indonesia's independence, English has never enjoyed the status of an official language that coexists with the national language, as in the case of Malaysia, India, or other countries that adopted English as a second language. One of the reasons is the deeply rooted perception among Indonesians that extensive usage of English is a tell-tale sign of weak nationalism. People who gravitate to English risk being stigmatized as 'Westernized,' which is always seen as negative (Alrajafi, 2021). This view confirms the status of English as a foreign language.

Establishing English as a second language in the early 1950s was also futile for at least two reasons. Lowenberg (1991) indicates that one of the main reasons is the scarce number of English native speakers among the Indonesian population. He also suggests that Bahasa Indonesia gained prestige and popularity since the Dutch left Indonesia. Sadtono (1976 in Dardjowidjojo, 1997) supports the above statement by saying that English is not and will never be a social language among Indonesians. English is not and will never be the second official language in this country. For these reasons, English remains 'the first foreign language' in Indonesia.

2. CLT and Western Learning Culture

The approach to language teaching, broadly labelled as communicative language teaching, emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as the emphasis switched from the mechanical practice of language patterns associated with the audiolingual method to activities that engaged the learner in more meaningful and authentic language use. Western educators and linguists were dissatisfied with the audio-lingual and grammar-translation methods in foreign language instructions. They felt that students were not learning enough realistic, whole language. They did not communicate using appropriate social language, gestures, or expressions (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, 2014).

There are several characteristics of CLT. Whong (2013) mentions that CLT emphasizes authenticity, learner autonomy, interaction, and task-based activities. She relates **authenticity** to authentic materials. Morrow (1977, as cited in Chen, 2023) defines authentic materials as 'an authentic text is a stretch of real language produced by a real speaker or writer for a real message.' In line with this definition, Srinivasulu (2020) says that authentic materials can be spoken, and written texts taken from noneducational sources such as newspapers, magazines, and publicly available video or audio broadcasts.

The second characteristic is **learner autonomy**, or other scholars call it **learner-centered** (Bacon, 1999; Cui, 2022; Harmer, 2011; Srinivasulu, 2020). Teachers act more as facilitators, allowing students to take charge of learning (Bacon, 1999). However, the teacher still sets up exercises and gives directions to the class.

The next feature is **interaction or communication**. Language is used to communicate (Whong, 2013). Language teachers using the CLT approach tend to teach students the social language to communicate properly in the target language (Bacon, 1999; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). Students are given more opportunities to practice the language they are learning through role-playing activities, such as buying food in the market or asking someone for directions.

The communication feature is related to the next characteristic, **task-based activities**. CLT prioritizes contextual dialogues through various activities like conversations, role-playing, group work, pair work, brainstorming, and mind mapping, among others, with appropriate drills. Through playful activities and trial-and-error methods, the teacher inspires the students to attain communicative competence (Srinivasulu, 2020). This idea is supported by Abdelhamid et al. (2020), who suggest that students must communicate to complete meaningful assignments.

The implementation of CLT in Western countries is fruitful, and this is due to the educational atmosphere and values in the classroom as well as in society. In Western society, children are accustomed to sharing their opinions or ideas, showing their agreement or disagreement with others, thinking critically, and not taking things they read or hear unquestioningly. Intellectual exchange is culturally ingrained in both formal and informal education. Within families, parents tend to be more open to letting their children decide what they want to do under their guidance. This cultural behavior influences classroom behavior regarding students' mindsets and learning strategies (Masduqi & Fatimah, 2021; Prihananto & Masduqi, 2021).

A study by Lengkanawati (2004) investigates learning strategies Australian students use in learning IFL (Indonesian as a foreign language) and Indonesian students in learning EFL based on their cultural background. She finds out that the two groups use different strategies. Because of the open relationship between teachers-

students in the classroom and parents-children in Australians' daily lives, strategies such as cognitive, compensation, and social strategies are used more by Australian students rather than by Indonesian students.

The relationship between students and teachers is more open than in Oriental cultures. Students are free to ask questions or even argue with their teachers. Teachers are also open to criticism and ideas from their students. For example, Australian students often volunteer their opinions when a teacher raises an issue or question. Occasionally, they interrupt their teachers to support or argue with the teacher's explanation. Conversely, teachers accept students' opinions, clarifications, arguments, and interruptions positively. They do not get offended, feel insulted or lose face (Sukono, 2004).

Another important feature is the learning environment. CLT, which is designed for ESL classrooms, provides opportunities for students who are non-English speakers to practice their English both in the classroom and in society. Moreover, the facilities such as audio and video media, language laboratories, and resources such as books, articles, and the Internet adequately support the teaching-learning process (Masduqi & Fatimah, 2021; Sukono, 2004).

3. Cultural Issues Hindering the Implementation of CLT in Indonesia

One main feature of communicative language teaching is its focus on learners. Richards and Rodgers (2001, 2014) say that in a communicative language teaching-based classroom, language teaching should be learner-centered and responsive to their needs and interests, while Dardjowidjojo (1997) is even more assertive: there is a need to develop learners' autonomy, which involves 'determining the objective, defining contents and progression, selecting methods and techniques being used, [and] evaluating what has been acquired.' While this idea probably works well in countries where principles of egalitarianism and democracy prevail, it is almost unrealistic to expect that such an idea will work in Indonesia, particularly because teacher-student relations are based on a 'culturally bound hierarchy' (Dardjowidjojo, 1997).

From a cultural standpoint, it would be difficult to implement the approach successfully in this country. The features of communicative competence discussed above seem to contradict the values and beliefs in the dominant culture of this nation, which is heavily influenced by the Javanese tradition (Prihananto & Masduqi, 2021). In the following section, a discussion on issues related to the ineffectiveness of CLT in Indonesia will focus on three important parts: student roles, teacher roles in teaching and learning practices in classrooms, and roles of society.

a. Students' Roles

From our experiences, we believe two famous Javanese philosophies underpin Indonesian students' learning behavior in the classroom, namely *manut lan piturut* (to obey and to follow) and *ewuh-pakewuh* (to feel uncomfortable and uneasy). These credos find their manifestations in the classroom context: students are considered good when they obey and follow their teacher's commands. Students have had a pre-structured attitude that the measure of being good or not good students is judged by their obedience to the *guru* (teacher). They are considered disrespectful if they have a different opinion from their teachers. It is, therefore, very hard to expect students to interact critically with their teachers in the classroom. They might feel uncomfortable and uneasy about saying something directly to their teachers, discussing controversial matters, and disagreeing with them.

The students' tendency to avoid direct disagreement and confrontation in the classroom is also strongly influenced by a cultural sense of 'saving face.' Students avoid embarrassing others or being embarrassed in public. Therefore, students only answer the teacher's questions if they know the right answer, which does not cause the latter to lose face.

It is very hard to change students' attitudes because values such as those of the two Javanese philosophies above are not only held in the classroom but also in their families. Children must respect their parents at home by obeying whatever they are told to do. Children are not allowed to interrupt parents while they are talking. Even staring at parents' or older people's faces while talking is considered impolite. If parents get angry with their children, the children must keep quiet although they are not guilty. Later, they can clarify the matter after they ask for forgiveness from their parents. However, they must be careful not to threaten their parents' faces (Masduqi & Fatimah, 2021; Prihananto & Masduqi, 2021; Sukono, 2004).

b. Teachers' Roles

Indonesians, in general, are not accustomed to the idea that learning activities are more student-generated than teacher-initiated. The widely held belief is that teaching is passing down knowledge from teachers to students, that the teacher knows everything, and that the student receives knowledge from the teacher. Because

of such beliefs, it is unrealistic to hope that the students will be active in their learning situations. In fact, Indonesian classrooms are generally renowned as unidirectional and quiet ones.

The word *guru* (teacher) means someone who must be *digugu* (trusted with everything they say) and *ditiru* (imitated). In Indonesia, teachers symbolize wisdom, trustworthiness, honesty, and honor. Therefore, people who have 'teacher' as an identity are highly respected by the community. In a small neighborhood called *kampong*, teachers are often appointed to hold the status of a community leader because people believe that teachers set a good example for others. This widespread social assumption has its roots in Javanese doctrine of *ing ngarsa sung tuladha* (give a good and real model).

Teachers are considered the 'fountain of knowledge,' meaning they are a source of 'correct' knowledge. Therefore, students would be surprised when they hear their teachers say, 'I don't know,' 'I'm sorry,' or 'I'm wrong,' because they are used to expecting their teachers to be knowledgeable. Based on our classroom observations, teachers have the proclivity to hide the fact that they do not know the answer to certain questions. Instead, they would rather ask their students to find the answers to these questions, but they would never check them. In addition, teachers seemed to ask questions with definite answers so that they could give the correct answer and would not lose their face in front of their students.

Shifting the role of the teachers from learning conductors to teaching facilitators is also easier said than done. Teachers are considered school-time parents for Indonesian students; being 'parents' means they should always play a leading role in the classroom. In most cases, teachers are the first person that parents contact when something happens to the students, even if it has nothing to do with schooling. As parents, teachers must be obeyed and trusted by students (Masduqi & Fatimah, 2021; Prihananto & Masduqi, 2021; Sukono, 2004).

c. Society's Roles

One of the enabling conditions for communicative competence is the availability of a supportive learning environment. Does this kind of environment exist in Indonesia? This is a tough question to answer. English is treated as a foreign language in Indonesia. As a result, students find it hard to practice and see how English is used in real-life situations. The language only circulates in their classroom and is not practiced beyond the school's premises. It is difficult to motivate students when they do not see an immediate need for the language outside the school. The notion that learning a language is learning how to communicate in that language is a vague construct because even though they learn a language, they will not use it in their social interactions. This condition is worsened because, in Indonesian education, English is not given any priority and is treated in the same manner as the subjects. In secondary school, for example, students only learn English four times a week, 45 minutes each time. Therefore, students lack opportunities to practice their English in class.

Moreover, students are reluctant and shy to practice their English outside the classroom partly because there is a traditional value known as *ilmu padi* ('rice' philosophy) held in society. This philosophy values humility and modesty: 'no matter how good you are at something; you must keep a low profile.' This philosophy is good because it teaches people not to feel superior to others, and instead of showing off what they have, they should use their knowledge to help others. However, this viewpoint disadvantages the English learning environment. Whenever Indonesian people talk among themselves by using any foreign language in public, they are regarded as showing off, and such behavior is socially discouraged. The same situation also afflicts students. They feel uncomfortable speaking English publicly because they do not want people to regard them as showy (Masduqi & Fatimah, 2021; Prihananto & Masduqi, 2021; Sukono, 2004).

4. Recommendations to Make CLT Effective

Changing students' and teachers' habits and attitudes in the teaching-learning process is not easy and time-consuming. However, there are ways to create a more conducive classroom learning atmosphere so students can learn English more communicatively. Teachers who are still dominant in classrooms play an important role as agents of change.

To overcome the students' discomfort and lack of ease when they want to raise questions or seek clarification, teachers must create an open line of communication with their students. This means that teachers must welcome students' ideas, opinions or even critiques without judging their students as disrespectful or impolite. Teachers must give positive feedback and not directly judge students' answers as correct or wrong. If students feel that their opinions are respected, they will be motivated to state their opinions freely.

Based on our classroom observations, students attending English classes at senior high schools were mostly uninterested in the subject. They were disengaged and felt that English was difficult because the teachers often asked them to read aloud and hastily corrected their pronunciation. Teachers also focused on grammar, so students were afraid to speak up for fear of making grammatical errors or mispronouncing words. However, some students were able to enjoy English lessons when the teachers asked students to share their opinions on

a particular topic. Students felt valued when teachers welcomed and accepted all opinions without saying whether they were wrong or inappropriate. They preferred that teachers correct their mistakes indirectly rather than point them out individually. Listing all difficult or mispronounced words on the blackboard and asking all the students to read and correct these words together.

Another way to create open communication with students is for teachers to get closer to students and act as friends. Teachers must be respected by students, but it does not mean that friendship between them is outlawed. Teachers can talk to and have small discussions with their students about the lessons or other trending topics outside the classroom. When teachers and students forge a friendly relationship, we believe they can eliminate students' feelings of hesitation, shyness, and reticence. Eventually, the students will be more active in participating in class activities.

Furthermore, to create student-centered learning, teachers must let students know that teachers are not the only source of knowledge. Teachers must create classroom activities that encourage students to talk more and find information from other sources. The activities can be in the form of discussions, presentations, or projects. We suggest that those activities be done in groups rather than individually because the students are not accustomed to doing such things. Teachers still play an important role in those activities as moderators or facilitators. Students can still ask their teachers about things they do not know, or they might ask for suggestions from teachers. Teachers must not let the students do everything alone because they will think their teachers are irresponsible and do not do their job well.

Regarding the learning environment, which is not quite conducive, it is difficult to change society's point of view and the 'rice' philosophy. Therefore, teachers and students should know that the opportunity to practice communication in English is limited. They must make use of time in the classroom wisely. Teachers should provide communicative activities and not focus only on teaching grammar. Another way to give students more chances to speak English without being afraid of being labelled as 'showy' is establishing a conversation club at school. This conversation club can be organized by students and monitored by their English teachers (Masduqi & Subiyanto, 2020; Sukono, 2004).

D.   Conclusion

Making a communicative language teaching approach suitable for the Indonesian setting is quite challenging, especially because the Western cultures in which communicative language teaching was invented differ from those in Indonesia. CLT needs to be culturally attuned and accepted by considering the different roles of students, teachers, and society. Teachers, who play the primary role in the classroom, need to use CLT with caution and prudence and redefine the teacher-student relationship so that the method fits seamlessly into the prevailing cultural norms. When implementing CLT in their English classrooms, teachers are advised to use more student-centered activities and combine different teaching approaches, such as structural and communicative approaches. In so doing, students will be more able to not only master the English structure but also use the language communicatively in meaningful conversations.

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