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PROCEEDINGS

ENGLISH EDUCATION - UNS

INTERNATIONAL TEFL CONFERENCE

*Current Belief in ELT and Its
Implication in English Classrooms*
May 18, 2013

INVITED SPEAKERS

Dr. Dat Bao (Monash University, Australia)
Prof. S. Mohanraj (EFL University, India)
Dr. Willy Ardian Renandya (NIE, Singapore)
Nugrahenny T. Zacharias, Ph.D (UKSW, Indonesia)
Prof. Dr. Joko Nurkamto, M.Pd (UNS, Indonesia)



English Education Department
Teacher Training and Education Faculty
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Table of Contents

Cover	i
Foreword	v
Table Of Contents	vi
1. Current Beliefs in ELT and Their Implications for Language Teaching <i>Dr Willy A Renandya</i>	1
2. Using literature in Pre-service Education Programs: What, Why and How? <i>Nugrahenny T. Zacharias</i>	8
3. Cultural mistakes in English language teaching materials <i>Dat Bao</i>	17
4. Teaching English in Today's World <i>English Education – UNS TEFL International Conference</i> <i>Dr S Mohanraj</i>	26
5. From Behaviorism to Constructivism and The Implication in Foreign Language Teaching Method <i>Endang Fauziati</i>	31
6. Schema Theory in Reading Class <i>Dr. Fahriany, M.Pd</i>	37
7. Dan Brown's <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> : The Deliberately and Provocatively Used Symbols and Their Significance in The Novel <i>Dr. Reimundus Raymond Fatubun, M.A</i>	41
8. Teaching English through New Digital Media <i>Venny Eka Meidasari, M.Hum.</i>	53
9. Students' Analysis on Conversational Implicatures in Comic Strips Based on Students' Learning Styles (A case study at the fourth year students of English Education Department of UNSWAGATI Cirebon) <i>Jaufillaili</i>	62
10. Optimizing the Use of the Task-Based Learning Method to Improve the Students' Writing Skill. (A Classroom Action Research at SMPN 3 Ngawi in the 2012/2013 Academic Year) <i>Dra. Wahyu Maharini, M.Pd</i>	69
11. Unity in Diversity in Non-Native Speakers' English <i>Prof. Jayashree Mohanraj</i>	77
12. The Effectiveness of Team Assisted Individualization in Teaching Listening Viewed From Students' Interest <i>Rengganis Siwi Amumpuni, M.Pd</i>	81
13. Investigating the English Syllabus of Room Division Department Related to the Needs of the Hotel Industries (A case study at Sekolah Tinggi Pariwisata Bandung) <i>Nuraeni Handayani and Retno Budi Wahyuni</i>	88
14. Teaching Speaking Skill Effectively to Hospitality Students at Bandung Institute of Tourism (a case study of Hospitality Department at Bandung Institute of Tourism) <i>Kuswardhani & P. Jessica J. Josary</i>	98

15. Introducing Teacher-Friendly Pragmatics to Students of English Education Department <i>Nury Supriyanti, MA</i>	103
16. The Teaching of Reading Comprehension Based on The Systemic Functional Linguistics <i>Fauris Zuhri</i>	107
17. Cooperative Learning: A Powerful Tool to Promote Student Interaction <i>Winda Hapsari</i>	116
18. Centered Approach and Teacher-Centered Approach in Teaching and Learning Structure, Which One Makes Better Achievement? <i>Sri Haryanti</i>	127
19. The Use of Authentic Materials in Teaching Reading <i>Brigitta Septarini Rahmasari, M.Pd</i>	136
20. Input in Group Work Interaction <i>Flora Nainggolan</i>	143
21. Achieving the Goals of Teaching through Logical Systematic Learning Process Based on Bloom's Taxonomy <i>Haris Budiana</i>	151
22. The Improvement of Quality of Students' Writing Corrected Using Coded Correction Feedback <i>Dr. Abdul Muth'im, M.Pd</i>	158
23. Mark Twain's <i>Luck</i> and Its Potential Communicative Learning Activities for EFL Students <i>Juliati, M.Hum. & Melania Shinta Harendika, M.A</i>	165
24. Teaching EFL Writing: Multicase Studies of Four Senior High Schools In the City of Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia <i>Tans Feliks</i>	172
25. Skipping Unknown Words as a Useful Strategy in Reading Comprehension <i>Kusumarasyati</i>	187
26. Triggering Students Critical Thinking and Active Participation in Large Language Class <i>Devinta Puspita Ratri, M.Pd & Yulia Hapsari, M.Pd</i>	191
27. Classroom Management: A <i>Nightmare</i> for Pre-Service Teachers at Lab High School Salatiga <i>Listyani, M.Hum.</i>	197
28. The New Design of Integrative Computer-Assisted Pronunciation Teaching (ICAPT) of English in Higher Education <i>Hasan Zainnuri, S.Pd.</i>	205
29. Objectives in Lesson Plan: Do They Reflect the Purposeful Teaching-Learning Activities? <i>Martina Mulyani & Emma Malia</i>	214
30. Promoting Socratic Seminar in Critical Reading Classes <i>Nurul Hasanah Fajaria, M.Pd</i>	222
31. Power Relation within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Classroom Contexts <i>Meinarni Susilowati</i>	228

32. Exploration of Teachers' Knowledge, Thought, and Their Professional Practice <i>Dr. Dwi Winarsih, M.Pd.</i>	233
33. Teacher's Beliefs about English Teaching and Learning: an Exploratory Study <i>Dr. Hersulastuti, M. Hum</i>	242
34. The Implementation of Podcast-Based Material in Listening Class <i>Tri Wahyuni Chasanatun, S.S, M.Pd</i>	251
35. Using <i>Gobak Sodor</i> Game in Teaching Reading Comprehension <i>Izzah Fijriyah, S.Pd</i>	256
36. Speeding Up Students' Writing through Ungraded Writing Activity <i>Rosmania Rima, M. Pd.</i>	261
37. Teaching English Pronunciation by Using You Tube's Audio-Video <i>Andrian Nuriza Johan</i>	266
38. Selection and Utilization of Instructional Media for Teaching EYL <i>Sri Fatmaning Hartatik, S.S., M.Pd.</i>	274
39. "Partnership" Model in English Classroom Management <i>Citra Dewi, M.Pd</i>	280
40. Building Students Character and Fostering Learner Autonomy Through Project-Based Learning Approach <i>Esti Kurniasih, S.Pd., M.Pd.</i>	286
41. Child Friendly Teaching Model in English Language Teaching: an Attempt to Promote Provision, Protection, and Participation <i>Senowarsito, Listyaning Sumardiyani – listyaning, Arso Setyaji, Dyah Nugrahani</i>	292
42. Good-Deed Campaign: Incorporating Character Education Through Project-Based Assignment <i>Maya Rizki Fauzia</i>	296
43. The Implementation of Integrated Curriculum in Teaching English to Young Learners <i>Nisa Aulia Azam</i>	303
44. Token Economy as an Effective Way for Increasing Student's English Speaking Motivation <i>Melina Anggraeni and Penny Hapsari Amivianingrum</i>	312
45. Preventing English Students From Making Errors Through Recognizing The Sources of Errors <i>Drs. Suroho, M.Hum.</i>	316
46. Teaching English Genres Through English Pop Songs <i>Ririn Pusparini and Syukriah Abdullah</i>	323
47. Integrating Critical Thinking Skills and Literary Studies: in search for a model to promote literary appreciation <i>Endang Eko Djati Setiawati</i>	331
48. Teachers' Response Toward Khanmohammad and Osanloo's Translation Rubric <i>Esriaty S. Kendenan, M.Hum; Rindang Widiningrum, M.Hum</i>	340
49. Effectiveness of Teaching English for Hotel Through Role-Playing Method <i>Budi Purnomo</i>	347

50. Using Cellphone Video Recording to Improve The Non English Department Students' Ability to Speak <i>Ive Emaliana, M.Pd</i>	354
51. '30 Hours IELTS Preparation Class Model': Its Implementation in SMA Labschool Jakarta <i>NurArifah Drajati</i>	361
52. Integrating Life Skills in Genre-Based Approach: a Classroom Perspective <i>Drs. Sajidin, S.S., M.Pd</i>	367
53. Task-Based Language Teaching in Grammar Class <i>Neni Marlina</i>	375
54. Developing ESP Learning Material for Culinary Skill Program of Vocational High School <i>Novitasari, S.Pd.</i>	381
55. Teaching Reading and Exploring Culture <i>Drs. Mugijatna, M.Si., Ph.D</i>	387
56. Studying English Based on Politeness by Using Media ' Short Film' in the Pragmatic Perspectives for Vocational School <i>Edi Sunjayanto Masykuri, S.S, M.Pd</i>	392
57. The Concept of Familiarity, Identifiability, Uniqueness, and Inclusiveness in Definiteness in English and the Analysis of Students' Writings <i>Ikmi Nur Oktavianti</i>	399
58. Reviving Rhetoric in English Language Teaching <i>Samuel Gunawan</i>	406
59. Adressing Classroom Management by Improving Teacher Preparation <i>Basuki, M.Pd.BI</i>	413
60. Preparing a Fit 'Menu' for English Language Teaching in Non English Majors <i>Ninuk Sholikhah Akhiroh, S.S., M.Hum</i>	421
61. Authentic Materials: A Promising Way to the Teaching of Grammar <i>Kurniasih, and Atik Umamah</i>	426
62. Teaching Reading by Using Question-Answer Relationships <i>Vita Vendityaningtyas, S.S, M.Pd</i>	434
63. Improving Students' Listening Comprehension Through Situational Comedy Series <i>Ni Wayan Mira Susanti</i>	441
64. Using Eclectic Approach to Teach Literary Elements of Classic Drama <i>Fredy Nugroho Setiawan, M.Hum.</i>	445
65. Code Switching in Teaching English at a Senior High School in Kuningan Regency <i>Yayan Suryana</i>	452
66. The Lexico Grammatical Qualification of Students Academic Writing at English Department of State University of Jakarta <i>Hasnini Hasra & Rahayu Purbasari</i>	462
67. Developing student's writing skill through the teaching of journal writing: A work in progress <i>Ribut Wahyudi</i>	469

68. The Use of Game "Lexathon™" as A Tool for Enriching Vocabulary Items for The Early Semester Students of English Department <i>Adesti Komalasari, S.Pd., M.A.</i>	474
69. "What Contexts Are You into?: Shifts in Approaching Literary Texts" (Current Belief in Teaching English Literature and Its Implication in English Classroom) <i>Arina Rohmatika</i>	481
70. Using Metaphor in Teaching Paragraph Writing <i>Aris Siswanti & Yuni Astuti</i>	487
71. Paraphrasing Skill of EED Students of UMK: A Preliminary Error Analysis <i>Muh Syafei</i>	495
72. Students' Multiliteracies Through Genre-Based Writing Teaching <i>Sri Mulatsih</i>	502
73. Redefining The Practice of Teaching English as A Foreign Language In Indonesia <i>Siti Sudartini, M.A.</i>	508
74. Using Cooperative Learning to Improve Students Participation In Inclusive Class <i>Iswahyuni & IkaPuspitasari</i>	514
75. Applying Concept-Based Controlling Idea Statement to Enrich Student's Writing (A Reflection of Teaching Writing to College Students) <i>Mohammad Fadil</i>	522
76. Outside-Classroom Activity Through Facebook (Optimizing Blended Learning Theory in ESP Classroom) <i>Arini Nurul Hidayati & Melisa Sri</i>	530
77. The Use of Cartoon Films for Improving Young Learners' Ability in Speaking English <i>Fitra Pinandhita, M.Pd.</i>	537
78. Modeling before Practicing: Utilizing Case Study to Accelerate Learning in <i>Contrastive and Error Analysis</i> Classroom <i>Elys R.R. Misrohawati</i>	542
79. Applying Both Contrastive and Error Analysis in Teaching and Evaluating Students' Writing Skill of English <i>Endang Setyowati, S.S.</i>	549
80. 'Constructing a Dialogue with Reading': Exploring the Idea for (Re)approaching Reading Texts <i>Budi Hermawan, S.Pd., M.P.C & Dr. Wachyu Sundayana, M.A</i>	557
81. Motivational Factors Contributing to the Establishment of The EFL Students' Good Reading Habits in English <i>Erna Iftanti</i>	563
82. Teaching English Literature in Indonesian Context: Challenges and Obstacles. <i>Atikah Ruslianti., M.Hum</i>	572
83. Testing Reading <i>Ngadiso</i>	578
84. Quality Teaching And Quality Assurance <i>Gunarso Susilohadi</i>	586

85. The Importance of Pronunciation Teaching in Achieving Successful Oral Communication <i>Drs. Martono, M.A</i>	591
86. Teachers' English Oral Competence a Study on the Language of Instruction of Junior and Senior High School English Teachers <i>Dr. Abdul Asib, M.Pd</i>	598

REDEFINING THE PRACTICE OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN INDONESIA¹

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Abstract

The term education is commonly defined as a complex human experience of individual growth and development, a process encountered in everyday life. In line with this definition, education in Indonesia needs to be defined as any necessary efforts to make every individual in this country having strong intention and character in promoting and maintaining the local and national moral values of this nation. Considering the need to promote and maintain the Indonesian moral values, it is necessary to reconsider the practice of English Language Teaching since the common belief underlying the practice of English Language Teaching is merely to wherever possible enable the learners to effectively communicate using the language in communication. There have always been more efforts done by most teaching practitioners to provide opportunities for the learners to understand as well as to practice the language in order that they can actively involve in the global communication. This common practice needs to be reconsidered since it tends to put aside one of the most essential parts of English teaching and learning, the one commonly called the ‘cultural awareness’—understanding of different cultures, which is one of the main components in the practice of ‘cross-cultural communication’. This present study, in particular, tries to provide a brief overview on the practice of teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia, and to redefine some important points related to it in order to provide some insights concerning the significance of ‘cultural awareness’ in the practice of English Language Teaching in Indonesia. Therefore, it will be a very great challenge for those who are actively involved in the practice of English language teaching to take this into their consideration.

Keywords: *redefining, teaching English, foreign language.*

Introduction

It is commonly believed that education though its series of processes does play a very significant roles in providing complex experience for every individual. It is education that provides people with knowledge and experience during their life period and development. Dewey (1938) as quoted by Rury (2005: 4) defines education a complex human experience of individual growth and development, a process encountered in everyday life. Rury also mentions that in other respects education can also be seen as the social and institutional activity of transmitting knowledge and values from one generation to the next, a process involving large segments of society. However, it is widely believed that those having a good quality of education in their life are commonly expected to maintain their future life better.

This is likely one of the reasons why our government has been trying hard to improve the quality of the educational system. The government even has decided to give additional budget in order to support the educational practices, such as for books, scholarship, and even increase the

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educators' salary in order to encourage them to do their best to help their learners. Those are significant efforts made by the Indonesian government that hopefully will improve the quality of education in this country. Not only that, the government has also been trying hard to give more opportunities for its citizens to get education. Currently, there is even a regulation to have the same amount of tuition fee for all of public universities. This is likely an initial step to provide more changes for Indonesian to get higher education. The government also has given many scholarship and tuition aids for the unfortunate people that they have the same opportunity as the fortunate ones.

On the other hand, in its practical practices, the term 'education' is closely related to practices that schools and teachers use to influence student learning and development although children's and adolescents' moral development and character formation are not simply the result of schooling (Nucci and Narvaes, 2008: 5). To provide a general guideline of the practice of education in this country, the Indonesian government has given explicitly the definition of the term education in the Act of *Republic Indonesia on National Educational System* that may be considered as,

....conscious and well planned effort in creating a learning environment and learning process so that learners will be able to develop their full potential for acquiring spiritual and religious strengths, develop self-control, personality, intelligence, morals and noble character and skills that one needs for him/herself, for the community, for the nation, and for the State. National education means education based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, and is rooted in the religious values, national cultures of Indonesia, and one that is responsive to the needs of the ever-changing era. (Act Of Republic Indonesia on National Educational System (Chapter 1 Article 1 and 2).

In line with this definition, education in Indonesia needs to be defined as any necessary efforts to make every individual in this country having strong intention and character in promoting and maintaining the local and national moral values of this nation. Considering the significances of having good quality of educational practices towards the nation identity, it would be much more beneficial to conduct a critical study on the practices of education in this country for the sake of providing better generation in the future who can hopefully maintain religious, national, and cultural values of this country and at the same time remain actively responsive to the needs of the ever changing era.

This study in particular tries to have a closer look on the practices of teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia. The discussions mainly cover the general overview of the practice of teaching English as a foreign language in this country and some important points to reconsider concerning that practice of teaching a foreign language and wherever possible proposes a critical consideration concerning the practice of teaching English as a foreign language in this country.

The Common Practice of Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia

It is widely believed that currently English is considered as *lingua franca*² that it encourages the spreads and developments of the English Language Teaching (ELT) in the non English speaking countries not to mention Indonesia. Jandt (2010: 6) once claims that the challenge facing the world at the beginning of the 21st century is to seek global solutions and to meet these challenges will require people living in this present moment to learn how to better communicate with one another regardless of where they live, of their economic status, and of

² Kate Woodford and Guy Jackson define *lingua franca* as, "a language which is used for communication between groups of people who speak different languages but which is not used among members of the same language".

their identity. It is this need to participate in the global communication that has likely been the main reason of positioning English as one of the most important foreign languages in this country that every Indonesian needs to learn as one of the subjects in schools.

In relation to the practice of teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia, the government has done many efforts in providing the facilities as well as opportunities for every Indonesian to learn this language either in the formal educational institution or the informal ones. In terms of facilities, there have been an explicit curriculum concerning the teaching of English for every level of education starting from junior high school level. English also has become one of the main subjects tested in the UN (*ujian nasional*) for junior and senior high school level. Previously, it even became one of the local content subjects in elementary school and even it tended to become the medium of instruction in teaching science subjects, such as, mathematics, physic, and biology for some classes in some 'specific schools' known as RSBI (*Rintisan Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional*). The teaching of English has also been conducted by many private institutions in almost every capital city in this country. These facts are merely some evidences of the need to learn and use English has not only become one of the government interest but also it has become the concern of most Indonesian society.

Unfortunately the underlying objectives of teaching English as a foreign language in this country cannot be said to be in line with the philosophy of education as stated in the Act Of Republic Indonesia on National Educational System (Chapter 1 Article 1 and 2) as mentioned. The main goal of teaching English as a foreign language in this country in line with the one practiced by most other non-English speaking countries is to make the students reach the 'communicative competence', the idea previously proposed by Hymes in the late 1970s. He mentioned that the idea of 'rules of use, without which rules of grammar would be useless' (Hymes, 1972: 278 in Corbett, 2003: 1872). In addition Corbett also states that this idea has given a powerful intellectual respectability to classroom practices that tended to go further beyond grammatical accuracy as the primary goal of language teaching and learning. This idea also has lead to the use of communicative approach in English language teaching.

The particular approach is likely a good one in the sense that it allows learners to go further from having a good grammatical competence to having the ability to use the language appropriately. Corbett (2003: 1875) claims that for most of the history of ELT, there has been the largely unquestioned assumption that most teachers are training learners to become as close to native speakers as possible, in the glomy knowledge that few will reach the goal. English teachers are commonly will provide as authentic materials as possible and work hard to make their students more native like. Most of them even provide much more materials originally from the English speaking countries. These kinds of efforts are good in the way that the students or learners get many exposures to the use of English by the native speakers. In other words, it can be said the term 'communicative competence' is likely defined as the ability to communicate effectively by using the language, in this sense, English, not only in terms of the language items used but also the sociocultural context of the target community using the language.

This particular approach to teaching tends to be much more beneficial as it is used to teach English as the first or official language but not in the context of teaching English as a foreign language considering the fact that teachers need to consider the learners' cultural background as well. They may come from a very different cultural background. Li in Robertson (ed) (2005: 73) mentions that teaching needs to be considered as a two-way dynamic communication process and through this process, a teacher delivers the course content/ knowledge though a certain pedagogical methods to students who make an effort to interpret, process, understand and respond to what is delivered and to achive the desired learning outcomes. Through this process both sides have their own sets of cultural values, norms,

assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, role concept, perceptions, expectations and meaning-making systems, which impact on the ways they communicate and prescribe the roles they play.

As the teacher tends to have the traditional view of the term ‘communicative competence’, it is the target culture that becomes the main concern. This common practice of ELT has put the learners to a situation in which they have no other choice than accept not only the linguistic elements but the cultural elements as well. It seems that most of our English teachers have not yet realized that it is widely believed that English as no longer belongs to a certain country, and hence there is a need to be culturally sensitive to the diversity of contexts in which English is taught and used (McKay in Rubdy, Rani and Mario Saraceni (eds), 2006: 127). This is actually in line with the current perspective of English as international language (EIL). This new insight towards English has also suggested that, in terms of materials, the traditional use of Western cultural content in ELT texts needs to be examined.

Considering the new perspective towards English, it seems necessary to consider what is mentioned by Byram et al (Byram et al. 2002: 13–33) that at the present moment, teachers need to become mediators that have to give priority not to the amount of knowledge to be acquired but to the development of new attitudes, skills and critical awareness in the students. They say that the task of the teachers is not to provide comprehensive information or bring the foreign society into the classroom for learners to observe and experience but to develop in students the competence that will make them relativise their own cultural values, beliefs and behaviours and investigate for themselves the otherness, what is different to their “norm”. English teachers need to make sure that the practice of teaching English as a foreign language is to enable learners to wherever possible to access and contribute to the large amount of information that is available in the language which is actually one of the primary reasons for learning English today (McKay, 2002: 128).

Some Important Points to Consider

In line with the current practice of English Language Teaching in this country, it seems necessary to have a clear understanding on some points closely related to the practice of teaching English as a foreign language in this country. Those are: 1) the need to have the same perspective over the definition of teaching a foreign language; 2) teaching a foreign language must be accompanied by teaching a system of culture; 3) teachers need to have a cultural awareness, and 4) the need to broaden the main objective of teaching English as a foreign language in this country.

The first point is actually in line with Pennycook’s statement related to the term English. He mentions that

English is closely tied to processes of globalization: a language of threat, desire, destruction, and opportunity. It cannot be usefully understood in modernist state-centric models of imperialism or world Englishes, or in terms of traditional, segregationist models of language. English needs to be placed within a more complex vision of globalization (Pennycook, 2006: 5).

In line with Pennycook’s statement, it is very important that any individuals actively involved in the practice of teaching English as a foreign language in this country to have the same opinion that the study of an additional language has commonly understood as a way of coming to understand another culture and its people (Liddicoat and Scarino. 2013: 1). Therefore, it does not mean that when they learn English they have to accept all of the cultural values and norms accompanying the foreign language and put their own cultural beliefs and

norms aside or even forget their own cultural norms and beliefs. They need to make sure that the teaching of English cannot be a new form of colonialism. Language not to mention English, needs to be seen as as the most important means of communicating, of transmitting information and providing human bonding and it has an overridingly important position inside any culture (House in Soler, Eva Alcon and Maria Pilar Safont Jorda (eds), 2007: 10)

However, the second point is closely related to the fact that teaching a language is considered impossible without teaching the culture. This idea is clearly stated by Richards and Renandya (2002:12) who claim that, “*whenever you teach a language, you also teach a complex system of cultural customs, values, and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting*”.

In addition Liddicoat and Scarino (2013: 2) also state that

... there are inherent intercultural processes in language learning in which meanings are made and interpreted across and between languages and cultures and in which meanings are made and interpreted across and between languages and cultures and in which the linguistic and cultural repertoires of each individual exist in complex relationships. Languages and cultures in language learning are not independent of each other.

One thing to be noted is the fact that language can be seen as an unseparable element of culture. Foley (2001:19) mentions that:

Language is often treated theoretically as a sub system of culture within cognitive anthropology but in practice and structure of language as revealed by modern linguistics has generally served as the paradigm for analyzing other aspects of culture

Following Nieto (2010: 136) the term culture itself may be defined as “the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and religion”. The next question the teachers need to bear in mind then is which culture they should teach to their students. In relation to this question, McKay (2002: 128) states that the approaches to the teaching of English as an international language needs above all to be culturally sensitive to the diversity of contexts in which English is taught and used. In terms of materials, this suggests that the prevalent use of western cultural content in ELT texts needs to be examined. Considering this, teachers need to consider integrating the source culture (that is the learners’ culture) and the target culture.

In relation to the third point, the idea of having cultural awareness is unquestioned. English teachers need to have a good sense of cultural element accompanying the linguistic elements in their teaching. What is actually meant by ‘cultural awareness is actually defined as the understanding of different cultures (Tanaka, 2006: 55). Teachers need to be aware of cultural items accompanying the foreign language material and do whatever they can do to give additional explanation on those foreign cultural elements to their students and it will be much more beneficial if they can find similar topic in the learners’ cultural background. By doing so, they will also make the class more interesting and encourage the lerners’ participation as culture is mainly believed as one of the most interesting topic, particularly when it is related with the source culture or their own culture. In addition McKay (2002: 129) states that all cultural content should be approached in a such a way as to develop a sphere of interculturality, in which students learn about another culture as a basis for reflecting on their own. Hence, she proposes the idea of thinking globally but acting locally that is highly relevant to the teaching of English as one of the international languages.

Then the last point to consider is likely the main objective of teaching English as a foreign language in this country. This idea is closely related to the fact that teaching a foreign language must be accompanied by teaching a complex cultural system. As mentioned earlier, that individuals concerning the practice of teaching English as a foreign language need to consider not only the target culture but also the learners' culture (the source culture). In line with this, it seems that the definition of communicative competence as the main objective of teaching English needs to be reconsidered. The aim of communicative methodology (as mentioned by Aguilar in Soler and Jorda (eds), 2007: 59) that is, to acquire the necessary skills to communicate in socially and culturally appropriate ways needs additional explanation. The term social and cultural require more clarification. Take for example the term 'culture' in that definition. The use of this particular term in teaching English as a second or foreign language in non English speaking countries commonly refers to the target culture, that is the culture of the native speakers of English.

Following Aguilar (in Soler and Jorda (eds), 2007: 63), in the context of teaching English as a foreign language in the non English speaking countries not to mention Indonesia learners have to become mediators who have the ability to manage communication and interaction between people of different cultural identities and languages, coming out from their own who have a privileged position between the home and the target culture, that is to say, learners must become intercultural speakers (IS). This replacement of final of objective of teaching English that is to have the ability as those native speakers to the idea of becoming intercultural speakers does not necessarily lead to lowering the standards of achievement expected of the foreign language learners either to changing the methods of teaching English in the classrooms. Teachers may remain using their previous teaching methods. It is the main objective that needs to be redefined.

The previous objective of teaching English as a foreign language that is conventionally defined as *native-like proficiency* needs to be redefined as to *intercultural communicative proficiency*. By doing so, learners are expected not only to have the ability to use the language appropriately in terms of socio-cultural context of the target culture but also they need to be able understand the spirit of otherness in terms of language and culture. Therefore, the objective of intercultural approach to teaching English as a foreign language is to promote the favourable development of the learner's whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture (Corbett, 2010: 1).

Conclusion

It is unquestioned that education is badly needed to maintain the life of a country, not to mention this country, Indonesia. As one of the non-English speaking country, the government has already made decision to put English as one of the foreign languages to be taught at school. This decision has already followed by giving more opportunities to the Indonesian to learn and master the language either from the formal institutions or the informal ones.

Unfortunately, the common practice of teaching English in this country remains weak in terms of providing learners adequate opportunities to learn and share their own culture in the culture. This phenomenon in particular is the main result of having the conventional view of teaching English as a foreign language. Most English teachers in this country mainly concern with conducting teaching and learning process that could provide learners having much exposure to English and opportunity to use English and wherever possible to make them be as

close as possible to native-like without considering the learners' cultural background. Even learners are supposed to put their own culture in inferior position compared to the target culture. This kind of foreign language practice is not necessarily in line with the spirit of education of this country.

Owing to the fact that the current practice of teaching English in this country, it seems necessary to redefine some main points related to the practice of English language teaching. The idea of changing the main objective that is from 'communicative competence' to intercultural communicative competence' seems to be one of the solutions. The idea of enabling learners to have not only communicative competence but the intercultural as well seems to be reasonable considering the fact that English has currently seen as the world language and people have no longer considered it belongs to a certain country or certain community of people. Everyone can learn and use this as a means to communicate and express their ideas to other people from other parts of the world. They may express their ideas, feelings, thoughts, or even explain the main differences of their culture compared to the Western culture in which this language is originally spoken for the sake of minimizing gap and having mutual understanding among them.

In addition, English teachers as well as all people involved in the practice of teaching English as a foreign language in this country need to consider teaching a foreign language as an intercultural event. The facts that teacher brings their own culture, the students bring their own and the language being learned is also a sub system of a certain culture need to be the main points to consider. Therefore, the idea of considering this kind of teaching as an intercultural activity seems reasonable. Alastair (as quoted by Cummins and Davison, 2007: 227) has even noted that

When educational success is defined and measured in terms of speedy transition to English, how can English learners be said to have succeeded if, in the process, their parents, communities, and even their own cultural identities are made to appear as failures?

Consequently, it seems that educators need to work harder to make this great challenge of promoting intercultural communicative competence in the practice of teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia into practice. This dream will come true if all of individuals concerning the practice of English in this country agree with this idea and consider it as an important step to maintain the nation identity. They need to start questioning themselves whether they agree or disagree with an idea saying that we need to think globally but act locally (McKay, 2002). I do believe that this idea needs to be the one of the underlying principles in teaching English in our beloved country.

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