

# THE RELEVANCE OF INDONESIAN CULTURES ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN INDONESIA: ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

English language teaching is ultimately aimed for communication. In ELT classrooms in Indonesia, teaching and learning activities generally do not satisfy this ultimate aim. The teaching and learning activities are strongly based on the whole-class teaching. This condition leads the students to work individually. However, the ultimate aim of ELT in Indonesia explicitly and implicitly requires the students to work together. Therefore, there is a gap between the teaching and learning activities in English classrooms and the ultimate aim of ELT in Indonesia. The students in small groups have opportunities to interact with each other. By having the interaction, they can practice their English together. This condition may provide a very good step to reach the ultimate aim of ELT in Indonesia.

ELT classrooms in Indonesia, mixed levels of ability of knowledge small groups based on zone of proximal development concept may provide two major advantages, among others (1) the less capable or knowledgeable students can maximize their ability of knowledge to the learning edge of their intellectuality, and (2) the more capable or knowledgeable students can have better understanding towards what they have told their peers. In Indonesia, working together in small groups in culturally called 'gotong royong'. This type of teaching and learning activities may increase the students' English ability of knowledge as well as satisfy the ultimate aim of ELT in Indonesia.

## I. Introduction

The status of English language in Indonesia always remains the same – a foreign language. This status implies, one of them, the meaning that not all Indonesian people need this language, not like Indonesia language, for example. Consequently, not all Indonesian people are concerned with, for example, the teaching of English in Indonesia. Ones who are concerned with the teaching of English in Indonesia may have already known, at least, six aspects related to the teaching of English – teachers,

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students, aims, teaching/learning materials, classrooms, and teaching and learning activities – that should be considered in order that the teaching of English can run smoothly.

In the teaching of English in Indonesia, there is a tendency that each of the above aspects may slightly vary from one place to another. This condition may lead to an idea that the teaching of English may need to be adjusted to suit the appropriate specific required condition. For example, the teaching of English in senior high schools may have different conditions from the teaching of English in private English courses. However, there are also some similarities, at least two similarities can be described at this moment, among the above aspects related to the teaching of English in Indonesia. The first similarity is concerned with the ultimate aim of the teaching of English – for communication. The second one relates to the teaching and learning activities carried out in classrooms – based on the whole-class teaching (some English teachers may have occasionally used small groups in their classes but they still lack of theoretical bases of why they use such small groups).

Having born in mind the differences and similarities in the teaching of English in Indonesia, this paper will slightly explore one possibility of using one type of small groups in the teaching of English in Indonesia. This type of small groups is based on the concept of teaching is relevant to the Indonesian cultures. Hopefully, this will at least provide those who are concerned with the teaching of English in Indonesia with fruitful knowledge towards improving and developing the teaching of English.

## **II. The Teaching of English in Indonesia**

The teaching of English carried out in Indonesia can possibly be classified into two categories: formal education and non-formal education. The teaching of English carried out in formal education covers those from primary schools to universities which are based on the existing curricula, and those in non-formal education cover, such as, private English courses. The implementation of English teaching under these two categories may have differences and similarities.

The differences between those carried out in formal education and non-formal education may relate to, for example, the teachers, students, aims, teaching/learning materials, classrooms, and teaching and learning activities. Among those differences, they may also have some similarities, for example, those related to the ultimate aim of the teaching of English – for communication, and the teaching and learning activities carried out in the classrooms – based on the whole class teaching.

In relation to the teaching and learning activities in English classrooms in Indonesia either in formal education or non-formal education, there is a tendency from along period of time that they have always been based on the whole-class teaching. This means that, in a general sense, the teachers are masters of knowledge (in this case, the teachers know ‘everything’ concerning the English) and consequently the students should learn ‘everything’ from the teachers, and the students do their English exercises individually. The whole-class teaching does not really support the achievement of the ultimate aim of English teaching in Indonesia because this type of teaching encourages the students to do their English exercises individually (Kutnick and Rogers, 1994). The ultimate aim of English teaching in Indonesia can be achieved if the students are allowed to do their English exercises together, for example, in small groups so that they can practice their English while they are doing their English exercises.

Therefore, there may be a gap between the existing teaching and learning activities in English classrooms and the ultimate aim of English teaching in Indonesia both in formal and non-formal education. This gap can be broken down by introducing and implementing small groups in English classrooms. This is because the students in small groups can have opportunities to interact with each other. The interaction among the students may provide opportunities for them to help each other to do their English exercises. Have allowed the students to help each other do their English exercises, they directly and indirectly have opportunities to practice their English in ‘real’ communication. This may ultimately lead to an achievement of the ultimate aim of English teaching in Indonesia.

### **III. Zone of Proximal Development**

The term Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is generally well-known among many primary school 'teachers' in the world. This term was firstly introduced by L.S. Vygotsky in early 1960s. Zone of proximal development is defined as that zone within which a child can achieve with help, with the support of the environment, of others, things they would be unable to achieve on their own (Vygotsky, 1962). In other words, ZPD means that in a classroom a child cannot have a maximum achievement in studying or working alone unless he/she is helped by his/her peers or teacher.

The concept of ZPD can only be implemented in primary school classrooms if the children are allowed to work or do their exercises in small groups. Having allowed the children working or doing their exercises in small groups, they have opportunities to interact with each other. This interaction may provide them with channels to help each other do their exercises, for example.

There are two general criteria of grouping children into small groups in primary school classrooms. One is concerned with the children themselves and the other is concerned with the tasks set up for them. The earlier one, such as age groups, attainment groups, interest groups, friendship groups (Kerry and Sands, 1982), ability groups, gender groups, and personality groups (Kutnick and Rogers, 1994), and the latter one, such as seating groups, working groups, co-operative groups, collaborative groups (Galton and Williamson, 1992), and mixed-ability or mixed knowledge groups (Sofendi, 1998).

The concept of ZPD can, for example, be implemented in small groups where the children are grouped on the basis of different levels of their ability or knowledge and the task set up for the groups (task demand – each child has the same task, intended outcome – each child completes the same assignment by helping each other). In this kind of small groups, the more capable or knowledgeable have chances to help the less capable or knowledgeable ones. This is because children who cannot do their work alone can make better progress if they are helped by the more capable or knowledgeable ones. As Vygotsky (1962 and 1978) says that the more capable or

knowledgeable children push the less capable or knowledgeable to the leading edge of their intellectuality.

The small groups based on the ZPD concepts are quite relevant to the Indonesian cultures. For example, it is very common among Indonesian students to do their homework together in their houses. They usually work in small groups, directly and/or indirectly, on the basis of the ZPD concept. This is because the group usually has mixed-ability or mixed knowledge students. Therefore, it is culturally claimed that working together in small groups on the basis of mixed-ability or mixed knowledge students belongs to the Indonesian students' daily lives.

#### **IV. The Relevance of Indonesian Cultures on English Language Teaching in Indonesia on the Basis of Zone of Proximal Development**

In Section Two, it has been described that there may be a gap between the existing teaching and learning activities in English classrooms and the ultimate aim of the teaching of English in Indonesia. The gap is the teaching and learning activities which are based on the whole-class teaching do not encourage the students to do their English exercises or to practice their English together in classrooms as the ultimate aim of English teaching in Indonesia does require. Therefore, it is considered that there is a need to introduce and implement small groups in English classrooms in order that the ultimate aim of English teaching in Indonesia can be satisfied.

In Section Three, it has also been described one possibility of introducing and implementing one type of small groups which is based on the concept of zone of proximal development proposed by Vygotsky (1962). In this type of small groups, the children in each of small groups have different levels of ability or knowledge, they do the same task, and they are expected to do their tasks together by helping each other in their small groups. In each small group, the more capable or knowledgeable child helps the less capable or knowledgeable ones. Being helped by the more capable or knowledgeable child, the less capable or knowledgeable ones can maximize their

ability or knowledge to the leading edge of their intellectuality. Besides, the more capable or knowledgeable child, by helping the less capable or knowledgeable ones, he/she also has an advantage, for example, he/she can have better understanding towards what he/she tells the less capable or knowledgeable ones.

Before discussing the relevance of small groups based on the concept of zone of proximal development towards the teaching of English in Indonesia, the relevance of concept of zone of proximal development towards adolescents or adults needs to be described. The concept of zone of proximal development implicitly claims that every child has 'zone' where he/she can fully use this zone if he/she is helped by the more capable or knowledgeable one(s). In practice, e.g. in classrooms, the children are helped by their teachers and/or peers so that they can fully use their 'zones' at maximum levels. Consequently, their achievements towards what they are learning can be enhanced to the maximum levels. This concept is also relevant to adolescents and adults, e.g. classrooms, because they are also helped by the more capable or knowledgeable people, teachers. Besides, they can also be helped by their peers in the classrooms if they are given some opportunities to do so. For example, they are asked to work in small groups and allowed to help each other. Therefore, it is assumed that the concept of zone of proximal development can be used to help not only children but also adolescents or adults in learning in classrooms.

Now, let us see the relevance of introducing and implementing the above small groups as they are claimed to be relevant activities in Indonesian cultures and in English classrooms in Indonesia, particularly in line with satisfying the ultimate aim of English teaching in Indonesia.

In general, every English classroom in Indonesia may have a group of students who have different levels of ability or knowledge (English knowledge). This is because the students started their studies not on the basis of levels of their ability or English knowledge. Although, there have been some attempts to run English classes, e.g. those in non-formal education, where their students are expected to have the same ability or

English knowledge but no one can guarantee that the students have exactly the same level of ability or English knowledge. Therefore, it can possibly and generally be said that every English classroom has a group of students who have different levels of ability or English knowledge.

The above condition of English classrooms in Indonesia may provide an opportunity to introduce and implement small groups which are based on the concept of zone of proximal development. This is because (1) each English classroom has a group of students who have different levels of ability or English knowledge, and (2) the ultimate aim of English teaching in Indonesia, for communication. These two reasons clearly allow the introduction and implementation of small groups. The introduction and implementation of small groups in English classrooms may provide at least two advantages. The first one is providing opportunities for the students to practice their English by helping each other among their group members and it is clearly relevant to satisfying the ultimate aim of English teaching. The second one is, by letting the students work together and help each other in small groups, the students' potentials as well as their teachers' ones can be used to enhance the learning outcomes.

## V. Conclusions

There may be two possible conclusions that can generally be drawn from this paper:

- The current practice of English teaching, teaching and learning activities held in English classrooms, in Indonesia which is based on the whole-class teaching does not really satisfy the ultimate aim of English teaching in Indonesia.
- The gap between the teaching and learning activities currently held in English classrooms and the ultimate aim of English teaching in Indonesia can possibly be broken down by introducing and implementing the small groups on the basis of ZPD concept which are relevant to the Indonesian cultures in English classrooms. Having introduced and implemented the small groups, the teaching and learning activities in English classrooms can hopefully satisfy the ultimate aim of English teaching in Indonesia as well as maximize the students' levels of achievement.

## VI. References

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