# Cultural Differences And Learner Strategies In Enhancing Student's Communication Skills

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| Article Info | ABSTRACT |
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| | *Written and verbal Communication skill in English is highly important in entering the global world. For this reason the Indonesian government has made English as a compulsory subject from secondary school to tertiary level. Instead of a lot efforts have been done in enhancing English communication ability, most of Indonesian students are far from being able to communicate in English. This may be closely related to the strategies that they choose in improving their communicative skills. Indonesia English learner tends to choose memory strategy in improving their English in general while other strategies such as metacognitive and social strategies are rarely employed by Indonesian learner. This phenomena might be closely related to the several critical factors, such as, characteristic of Indonesian student, passive learner, and the most important factor is that might be related to teaching and learning practice in the classroom in which it is constructed based on the Large power distance culture where teacher is regarded to be the one who is knowledgeable and students is like a bottle that need to be filled up with the knowledge. As a result, classroom teaching practice tends to adopt teacher centred approach in which teacher transfers knowledge to the students. This model of teaching is far from being developing student's strategies in improving their communication skill while students learn through the way teacher delivers the lesson in the classroom. Therefore, this paper briefly overviews the student's lack of using certain strategies in improving their communicative skill as the impact of teacher centred approach in which resulted from Large power distance culture. The alternative ways of approaching student's learner strategies and teaching practice will also be addressed at the end of this paper.* |

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### Introduction

English has been becoming one of the international languages in the globalisation era. It is very essential in the world as the language of knowledge, technology, social economy, art, and English has been viewed as the requirement for entering globalization (Zacharias, 2003; Yuwono (2005) because someone should be able to speak more than one language (Purnamasari, Putra, & Suwastini (2018). One of the critical skills English that should be possessed by student is communication skill, written and spoken. As a consequence, the Indonesian government has made English as a compulsory subject at secondary school with the expectation that student could use English for communication. Besides the school setting, English lesson is also offered at private institution where students can improve their English ability. In spite of the efforts made by the government and parents for enhancing student's ability in using English, a lot of high school graduates students are not apparently able to communicate in English (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Madya, 2010). This means that most students who graduated from secondary and high school school could not achieve the goal for learning English which is to take part in communication with another English speaker either spoken or written (Little wood (1983. P. 17). On the other hand, some students could achieve their learning goal in which they can use English for communication and in fact they can pursue their higher degree in English speaking countries. Thus, there might be some critical factors contributed to the failure and success in language learning.

Two of the key factors that partially contribute to the improvement of English, especially communication skills are learner strategies (Alfian, 2018; Chamot, 2004; Khosravi, 2012; Oxford, 1990; Wenden and Rubin (1987)) and the teacher`s approach which might be shaped by the culture.Wenden and Rubin (1987) state that research on LLs indicate that proficiency and achievement in language skills could be improved by using and choosing appropriate language learning strategies in which the choice of the strategies depend largely on the cultural background (Alfian, 2018; Chamot, 2005; griffith Lengkanawati, 2004; Oxford, 1990 ; Griffith, 2003,2008). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is intentionally to discuss the impact of cultural differences on the choice of teaching approach and learner strategies choices in improving their English communication skills, as well as the possible alternative ways in enhancing learner strategies based on the cultural differences. The guiding questions for this paper are: How do cultural differences influence the teaching practice that gives domino impact to the learner strategies in improving their communication skill? What are the possible solution for classroom teaching practice in order to improve student`s communication skills? Thus, this paper will be initiated by discussing learner strategies in language learning and the Indonesian learner strategies choices. This discussion will be followed by analysing cultural differences in teaching and learning based on Hofstede`s (1986) power distance cultural model anditsimpact on teacher`s teaching practice in which contribute to the learner strategies choice. Finally, this paper will discuss possible ways in improving classroom practice which will lead to the improvement of student communication skill.

### Review of Literature
a. **Defining learner strategies**
   *Learner strategies and communication skills*

Learner strategy is one of the most important factors that contribute to the success of language learning. Brown (1994) argue that successful mastery of second language learning depends on the battery of strategies in which the time, efforts, and attention to the target language should be invested. Furthermore, Ni et al. (2008) stated the most important factors that determinesuccess in language learningis the frequency or appropriate use and choice ofthe learning strategies.According to Phakiti (2003),there are two types of learner strategies: learning strategies and use strategies. Learning strategies is the strategies that the learners use to improve their learning and acquisition whereas use strategies are the strategies that are used by the learner to improve the performance. He furthers explained "Learning strategies are ongoing and continuous in nature, whereas use strategies are associated with a specific situation" (Phakiti , 2003,p 29). So, in this paper, learner strategies refers to learning strategies and strategies use that areemployed for enhancing students` communicative skill (verbal and written communication).

Wenden (1987) defines learner strategies as language learning behaviour of the learner in order to regulate the learning of a language. In this definition Wenden (1987) emphasize that behaviour of learning refers to the specific actions or techniques applied for alearnerwhether observable or not, are problem oriented, contribute to learning directly and indirectly, may be consciously deployed and are easy to change.Such behaviour also refers to any change of an entity with respect to its surrounding (Rosenblueth, Wiener, & Bigelow, 1943). In this sense that, learner strategies is influenced by the classroom culture. Donato and Mccormick (1994:454) argued sociocultural theory emphasized "the emergence of learner strategies is a process directly connected to the practices of cultural group (classroom member) through which novices develop into competence members of these communities". This means that the central issue of the individual strategies use is affected by social life in the classroom. Thus, from this view, the social practice of the classroom culture generates language learner strategies. This can also means that learner strategies based on the certain belief owned by language learner that they obtained from classroom.In another word, student's action, thinking and ways of learning are shaped by theclassroom culture practice.

As mentioned above that strategies can be obtained through the surrounding by experiencing the use the language as a habit and through modelling by observing others one use the strategies. Bandura`s(1977a)social theory of learning explained most of the behaviour that people display and learned either deliberately or in advertently, through the influence of example. In another word, behaviours can be obtained by observing others to perform such behaviour. This means that language learner could enhance their learning by looking at the strategies or wayofteachers or good language learners strategies.

In terms of language learner strategies category, there are lot strategies that lead to the success of language learning. Oxford (1990, 1995), proposes some language learning strategies, such as Metacognitive strategies: paying attention, controlling and evaluating, affective (emotional, motivation-related,anxiety reduction), strategies and social strategies: asking questions, cooperating with native speakers of the language or other English speaker., Memory strategies: grouping, imagery, Cognitive strategies: reasoning, analysing, summarizing, Compensation strategies (to compensate for limited knowledge): guessing meaning from the context in reading and listening.These strategies were utilized by language learner across the world and the certain

strategies preferences were vapored by certain group of learner based on their nation (Grifith, 2003; Lan, 2005; Lee & Oxford, 2008; Peacok & Ho, 2003; Wharton, 2000).

From the above strategies, some strategies or variety of strategies, such as, social strategies and metacognitive strategiescouldpossibly lead to the improvement of communication skills and could develop student's proficiency. In the view of learning theory, Stern (1983)emphasized that language learning involves many aspects, such as social and affective aspects. According to Cohen(1998), O'Malley &Chamot( 1990), Wenden, (1991) metacognitive strategies, which focus on raising the learner's awareness of the learning process, might enhance L2 skills. Furthermore, another expert believed that developing strategies for communicationskillcould possibly improve learner communicative skills.Thus, raising learners' awareness of strategies that they might use to solve potential communication problems could develop their oral proficiency (Cohen, Weaver, & Li, 1998; D¨ornyei, 1995).

Given the fact that some strategies such as, social, communication strategies, and metacognitive strategies are among the strategies that could probably improve learner`s communicative skill, however, by contrast, research shows that Indonesian learners tend to use memory strategiesin which grouping and structure reviewing are prioritized. Social strategies (practicing and cooperating with other, asking questions, and becoming culturally aware of the language) is rarely employed by Indonesian learner (Lengkanawati, 2004; Setiyadi 2004). As a result most of Indonesian Englishl earner could not communicate in English either spoken or written. Thus, the goal of language learning which is to take part in communication with another English speaker either for spoken or written ( Little wood,1983:17) could not be achieved.

As it was stated above that the strategies could be learned by observing and modelling the behaviour of the other performs such behaviour. By looking at the strategies or way of teachers or good language learners strategies will also enhance the strategies. In addition, the social practice of the classroom culture generates language learner strategies. As the fact that students learn the language and the strategies through teaching and learning delivered by the teacher. The student imitates and model the strategies based on their teacher approach of teaching. Whilst teacher approach in teaching can be influenced by their cultural value, their approach will be depending on what he/she believes the best ways to teach. As the consequence, students are the product of classroom culture that is shaped by teacher culture. The following section will discuss the cultural differences that might be closely related to the classroom practice and the choices of certain strategies.

**b. Culture and how it shapes the classroom teaching and learning practice**

The word "Culture" has a complex and different interpretation of meaning. The meaning can depend on the context. It is also changing in meaning through time (Heather, 2007). Culture can refer to all activities and creativities that are practiced and shared by a group of people. It can also be define as the way of live in the group of people which is inherited from generation to generation . Wadham, Pudsey & Boyd (2007, p.6) define culture as "the ongoing process of interpreting, valuing and making the world. Culture is the embodied lenses we inherit from the past via which we look at the world, the grid of intelligibility we have to make sense of everything around us and of ourselves". In this definition, it is implicitly stated that symbols and signs, language, values and

meaning, beliefs, norms, rituals, and material objects are the components culture. This includes the value, belief, ritual etc of teacher and students in the classroom. Furthermore, culture is previously been defined as the sharedknowledge and schemes created by set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to social realities around them (Lederach, 1995).

Goddard (2005) states that the word "culture" was a noun process used by earliest English. It refers to the tending of crops, animal, etc. The meaning of culture is "cultivating" which can be found in the words, such as agriculture, horticulture, and viviculture. Goddard emphasizes that the world culture which is used in anthropology was first introduced by Tylor 1887 in the book entitled primitive culture. Tylor provides the definition of culture as "the complex whole which include knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, customs and other capabilities and habit acquired by man as member of society". So, with this definition, culture can cover a broad area in certain community. Tyler was the first man introduced the word "culture" in the anthropology field, it become the key word of anthropology. Krober and Kluckhon (1952 in Lyman, 2008) provide the definition of culture as a "set of attributes and products of human society, and therewith of mankind, which are extra somatic and transmissible by mechanisms other than biological heredity." So people learn from other rather than inherit from their ancestor. In this case, that`s why culture can change through time. In the rural community, culture can mean the tradition or customs of certain society. So it is what people usually do in their group and how they live every day. For example, the villager in my area do gathering and play traditional dances for waiting prominent guest, such as governor. This practice can be categorized the culture of respecting people. So when we ask to the common people in my area about culture they will say that culture is referring to the dance, music, song, and traditional practice in the society. So, in this case, the world "culture" refers to the artistic works and practices, such as music, literature, painting, theatre and film.

According to Hofstede (1980. P.25), culture refers to the "collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another". He then clarified that culture includes system of value; and value are among the building block of culture. Cultures determine the identity of a human group in the same way as personality determines the identity of individual. In this way identity of the people in the classroom in a school is shown by the culture in the classroom.

Hofstede (1980, 1986) categorized five dimension model of cultural differences in which human culture could be differentiated: (1) Individualism vs collectivism (2) individualism vs. collectivism (2) power distance, (3) masculinity vs. femininity, (4) uncertainty avoidance, and (5) long-term vs. short-term orientation. Each of the culture dimensions has its characteristic of the value of the people who live in the culture. These cultural differences are important for teaching and learning because they determinewhat approaches is used by teacher and how the students received the lesson form teacher and the peer to improve their strategies in learning. In this paper, the writer only discussescultural difference in terms of Power distance in the classroom teaching and learning practice which could possibly lead the teacher to adopt certain teaching approach. Whilst the teaching approach that teacher adopt as a result of their cultural values direct students to use certain strategies in improving their communication skill.

Power distance refers to the extent to which the less powerful persons in society, organization or institution accept and expect that power is distributed unequally and considers as

normal. It is also defined as "a measure of the interpersonal power or influence between boss and subordinate as perceived by the less powerful of the two" in organization. Power distance is based on the concept of inequality. Inside an organization, inequality in power is inevitable and functional. This formalized in hierarchical boss – subordinate relationship (Hofstede, 1980 1986).Different nation or a culture group has a characteristic of power distance. Smaller power distance is often found in the countries, such as, Australia, USA, and Europe in which thepower is distributed rather equally. In these countries, status symbol and privilege tend to be ignored by people. Equal right is given to all people and status differences should not be displayed (Noorderhaven, 1999). On the other hand, the countries, such Indonesia, India, and Brazil obviously have a large power distance in whichpower is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 1980 1986) and status symbol are accepted and privilege are given to the power holder(Noorderhaven, 1999).

In term of teaching and learning practice, power distance characterizes a number of differences among teachers and students. According to Hofstede (1986) in a small power distance classroom, the teacher respects the independent of his students and applies student's centred approach in teaching and learning which mean students do not wait for instruction, approval, correction, advice, or praise from their teacher. They cooperate, learn from and help each other. Teacher is available for help when they have difficulty or when they asked for advice (Jones, 2007). Student is also allowed to criticize their teacher spontaneously. In addition, the learning process happens by applying two ways communication in which create the self-confident and create learner autonomy.

In a large power distance classroom, the relationship between students and teacher are hierarchical. Teacher is highly positioned because it is believed that teacher has a lot of knowledge to be transfer to the student. Teacher is expected to know everything and they have never criticized and contradicted. Therefore, students may likely speak up only when they are allowed by the teacher. Consequently, teacher always initiate to communicate in the classroom. Thus, this feature of classroom tends to be teacher centred approach in which it aligned with " transmission model of teaching where the information is moved or transmitted to and into the learner (Bonk & Cunningham, 1998; Duffy & Cunningham, 1996; Greeno, Collins, &Resnick, 1996; Kember&Gow, 1994 as cited in (Schuh, 2004). This feature happen because teacher is highly positioned by the students and the teacher is regarded to know everything while students are passive. The following section will discuss the impact of teacher centred approach as the cultural practice of teacher toward learners` strategies on the improvement of communicative skill.

### c. The Impact of Teacher Centred Approach on Learner Strategies

As a country with a larger power distance, it is obvious that the strategy choice of Indonesian studentin improving their communication skill is influenced by teacher teaching approach in which teacher tends to adopt teacher – centred approach or something like teacher centred approach, such as Grammar translation Method (GTM). This method is likely used by English teacher in Indonesia (Subekti, 2011). This method cannot improve student communication skill.

Teacher centred approach is associated with the traditional approach of language learning.

It is defined by (Zohrabi, Torabi, & Baybourdiani, 2012) as passive learning in which occur in a setting that the teacher plays the main role to present the information to the students and to direct the learning process of students (Shuel, 1996). In this model, the teacher identifies the lesson objective and takes the primary responsibility to guide the instruction by information and modelling. Teacher centred approach is obviously cannot improve student communication skill and it is not appropriate for classroom language learning based on the several critical reasons.

Teacher centred approach, such as Grammar Translation Method emphasized the teaching of Grammar in which focus on the building sentence type, word order, compound sentence and word classes. Grammar rule memorization is compulsory for the students. Richard (2006) stated that GTM emphasize on the grammar competency and accuracy as the basis of language proficiency. This approach of learning cannot improve student's communication skill since the teaching of speaking listening, reading, and writing is not balance and teaching material lacks any audio-visual facilities to encourage communicative activities (Moradkhan &Sohrabiyan, 2009).

Another drawback of teacher centered learning is that students is depending too much on the supervising of the teacher. This contradicts with the main objective of modern pedagogy to create strong self-directed learners. A teacher- centered learning atmospheredoes not either facilitate or empower a learner's autonomous study-skills and subsequently lifelong learning skills (Trilling &Fadel, 2009).Furthermore, this approach does not promote higher cognitive skills include abilities like analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. In addition, it does not also promote metacognitive skills such as in problem based learning including the question about the justification and the validity of arguments, not just the given reason themselves (Barrows H., 1992).

From the disadvantage of teacher -centered approach, it is clearly emphasized that this approach is far from achieving the goal of language learning to improve communication skill for Indonesian student.This approach does not develop advanced communicative and cross-cultural skills. As Brown (1994, p.165) stated that "A language is part of a culture and a culture ispart of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture". In a sociocultural view of language development, the focus is on the social processes in which the learner participates. This emphasized that Communicative skill is obviously to be improved by interacting with others.

### d. Possible Solution to Develop Student's Strategies and to Improve Teaching Practice

From the previous section, it is clearly explained that teacher centred approach as the impact of culture could not improve students' communication skill and language learning in general. Students are not able to develop their strategies in improving their communicative skill. They remain to maintain the strategies in memorizing the language rule. Therefore it is very important to find the possible ways in improving learner`s strategies for improving communicative skills and classroom language learning. In addition, the solution is also need to be addressed in terms of teacher teaching practice.

The first possible solution that could be implemented for teaching and learning practice is that the process of change in the classroom. Some literature on language learning suggested that learner strategies and English classroom teaching and learning practice could be improved by what Freire (1970) has said about change in education in general. The process of change could actually

also be  implemented in the language classroom. Classroom with hierarchical power relationship in which focus on the product, authoritarian structure, pre rigid curricula, learning with purposes to be able to pass in the exam, praising only " correct" answer should be changed into egalitarian structure (Suharmanto, 2003). Egalitarian structure focuses on process, flexible and valuing intuition and synthesis.  In this view, the changes of the role of teacher or teacher approach, and student's role also need to be done. The role of teacher in large power distance culture tend to be authoritative should be changed into facilitator, co-communicator, manager etc. (Oxford, 1990).

The second solutions for improving learner strategies is by teaching learning strategies to the language learner either by integrating it to the teaching or by conducting  strategy training. (Grenfell &Macaro, 2007) state that successful leaner strategies can be transferred into unsuccessful learner since language learning strategies are teachable. As it was emphasized by Alfian (2018) that successful or high proficiency of language learner used many strategies in learning English compared to those who are low proficiency level. Chamot (2005) proposed the guideline for teacher for teaching language learning strategies as follow: Modelling the strategy, using the strategy name, telling the student the reason to use the strategy, reminding students to use strategies in when they are learning, providing the opportunities to the student to discuss the strategies. However, this strategy training or strategies` teaching might not happen if the classroom practice has not been changed as it was previously suggested.

The last possible solution is that by encouraging teacher to use target language and communicative approach in teaching. Using target language in teaching could trigger intrinsic motivation of student in which because students might enjoy hearing English pronunciation of English. However, most of Indonesian teacher use Indonesian language in teaching English. This could not encourage the student to use the target language because their teacher as a model for students does not use the target language. Furthermore, using communicative approach encourage students to interact with teacher and their peer. This will develop their communication skill and their English in general. Schmitt and Celce-Murcia (2002, p.11) argued "it is only through social interaction with others that humans develop their language and cognition". In addition,  the sociocultural view of language development helps to provide a theoretical foundation of communicative approach use to language teaching and learning, according to which language is learnt in the process of using it to interact with others (Williams and Burden, 1997).

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper is intentionally to discuss the impact of cultural difference on the choice of teacher approach that influences the learner strategies choices in improving English communication skills and the possible ways in enhancing learner strategies based on the cultural differences. It cannot be denied that in larger power distance country, the classroom practice tends to adopt teacher centred approach in which the student becomes passive and merely depends on the teacher. This gives great impact to language classroom in Indonesia setting in which students does not improve their communication skill since they are mostly taught with the grammar rule of English, as a result student tends to use memory strategies in improving their communication skills. While communication skill is very important to participate in the classroom English and global

competition, some important keys that can be used to improve Indonesia language learning and teaching is through changing classroom practice, strategic training model, and using target language and communicative approach in teaching.

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