

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out the background of the study, the research questions, and the purpose of the study as well as its significance. The organization of the thesis is also highlighted.

#### **1.1 Background of Research**

Teaching culture has been commonly known in English language teaching. Actually, knowing the cultural aspects of the English language is very important, especially when communicating with other people with different cultural background. In this era, particularly, where globalization has spread so widely and quickly, people will increase their contact with individuals from other cultural background (Brislin, 2001, in Dornyei & Csizer, 2005). Communication is mostly done by recognizing international languages of the United Nations, especially the English language.

Obviously, every language has different culture and it affects the ways of people's communication among cultures. Levine and Adelman (1993) state that someone's success in developing cross-cultural rapport is directly related to someone's ability in understanding other's culturally influenced communication styles. In many cases, second and foreign language learners find difficulties in communicating with native speakers of the target language because of the complexity of speech acts since they are conditioned by social, cultural, situational and personal factors (Cohen and Olshtain, 1993). Accordingly, the use of language without knowing the cultural aspect of a language will trigger ambiguities. A speaker will not deliver the intended meaning in the target

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language. It happens because when two people with two different languages communicate one to another, they may not have the same perception of the environment and the world they have already known. They will bring the perceptions and values that they have manifested in the way they communicate.

Risager (1996, as cited in Larzen, 2005) distinguishes three perspectives on the relationship between language and culture. The first is a traditional way of approaching culture from linguistic point of view. It comes from a view that culture is embedded in the pragmatics and semantics of language. The second, culture is the macro context of language usage that lies behind modern socio-linguistics, although the term frequently used is socialstructure. The third, culture is the thematic content of language teaching that involves viewing culture as pedagogically and politically determined.

In teaching a foreign language, the knowledge about the target language culture becomes a central contextual factor that facilitates the success of learning a foreign language in contextual and meaningful way (Brown, 2000). In addition, Vernier et al. (2008:268) explains that teaching culture is considered as a fifth skill for language learners that enhances their overall learning experience. Moreover, Kramsch (1993) defines culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill in the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Culture has been considered as some sort of fifth macro-skill, which is introduced when the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing have been established.

The intercultural approach provides a different approach to teaching and learning a foreign language. It tends to combine both of language and culture and to understand the relationship between them in the teaching process. However, there is a separate section reserved for culture, for example, in language textbooks. Therefore, the development of a curriculum-based intercultural

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approach in English language teaching is still not familiar, especially in Indonesia (Tantri, 2013). It is known that in Indonesia, English as a foreign language is a compulsory subject and studied at school from elementary to university level (Lengkanawati, 2004), then the recent government policy in the curriculum 2013 considered that English is no longer as a compulsory subject in the primary School level (Arif, 2015). Nevertheless, English has become one of the requirements for students to graduate in junior high and high schools. Likewise, at the university, English is one of the subjects that is studied in all departments and faculties.

However, in learning English at school and university, there is not necessarily a guarantee to implement an intercultural approach that the cultural aspects of the target language are also studied, or at least inserted in each lesson including in the materials. Damen (1987) states that the curriculum of ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign language), or any language classroom are not usually involved in the cultural guidance of the stated curriculum. Byram (1988, as cited in Liddicoat and Kohler, 2012) states that cultural understanding has been included in such programs. It has typically been separated from the learning of language. In the current Indonesian Education policy, the government tends to consider that foreign languages will diminish the people's sense of nationality (Sukarno, 2012). It seems that the government assumes that the foreign culture in the English language teaching possibly can give bad effects to the Indonesian culture. Tantri (2013) also adds that many schools are reluctant to accept English culture in teaching English at the school although it has positive attitudes to the need and necessity of teaching and learning of the English language.

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Moreover, it has been a problem in learning English which only emphasizes understanding of structures and patterns of language without understanding the cultural aspects which is considered important. This problem does not only arise from unimplemented curriculum-based intercultural approach, but there are also other factors such as teachers, textbooks, facilities and etcetera. On the other hand, the insertion of local cultural values in each text or English textbooks is also an important consideration to keep the students knowing the local culture (Sukarno, 2012). In addition, Fardini (2014) suggests that the materials and contents should be employed in order to make learners aware of the intercultural mainstreams, encourage them to compare and contrast foreign cultures with theirs. Therefore, as supported by Liddicoat and Kohler (2012:95) that “if language education is to achieve the goals of intercultural understanding that sets for itself, it is important that the intercultural approach takes a central place in practice”.

Another crucial problem is derived from the English teachers themselves who do not quite understand the concept of the target language culture (Rodliyah & Muniroh, 2012). They usually do not know how to convey the cultural aspect of target language in teaching English. This misunderstanding is a complex issue because a teacher is a primary source of information and a mediator in the classroom. In addition, Ho’s study (2009) suggests a shift from a traditional to intercultural stance in EFL classrooms that contribute to teachers’ professional development. Thus, the awareness of the inextricable relationship between language and culture and teaching culture as an integral component of language teaching can be more improved by English teachers.

Therefore, teachers should understand the cultural knowledge and likewise they also understand the knowledge of English language in general. As stated by

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Gu (2005), intercultural understanding enables teachers to preserve an open yet critical mind to look for differences and similarities in pursuit of appropriate pedagogy. Ideally, a non-native English teacher who has lived or studied in English speaking countries or any other country will be easier to understand the culture of the target language because they have communicated directly with native speakers. However, it is not the reason to not understand the target culture because through the advancement of technology and the availability of many books they could learn the cultural differences by themselves. As stated by Byram et al. (2002), a teacher does not need to know everything about the target culture, but his role is to help learners to understand how intercultural interaction takes place. However, to implement the method, a teacher must understand the basic concept of intercultural language learning itself as well as incorporate culture and knowledge of the target language.

Finally, this study tries to fill the gap from previous studies which were mainly conducted in other countries that possibly have a different situation of educational environment as well as students' background of English skills. This study was done in the Indonesian context, especially in West Java, which is also known that English is considered as a foreign language with various backgrounds of the local community. More specifically, this study was conducted at the English Education Department at a state university in West Java.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

Derived from the background of the study above, this study attempted to investigate some issues in implementing the intercultural language learning. The research questions are then formulated in the following lists.

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1. How is the intercultural language learning implemented in an EFL classroom?
2. What are the students' responses to learning English with intercultural language learning?

### **1.3 Purpose of Research**

The purpose of this research is to answer the research questions above namely:

1. To discover how intercultural language learning is implemented in an EFL classroom.
2. To find out the students' responses to learning English with intercultural language learning.

### **1.4 Significance of the Research**

The result of this research is expected to contribute and provide informational input to those who involve in intercultural language learning in English language teaching. The following are the significance of this research.

#### **1.4.1 Theoretical Significance**

The result of this research is expected to promote intercultural language learning as a method in English language teaching in Indonesia especially in West Java. In addition, it is also expected to contribute and enrich the literature on the implementation of intercultural language learning in EFL context especially for further studies in the similar topic.

#### **1.4.2 Practical Significance**

The practical significance is addressed to the three parties namely:

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1. To students: It is expected that this research would improve the students' understanding about the target language (English) culture as well as the importance of learning both language and culture to be applied in their teaching practice in the future.
2. To teachers: The result of this study would provide information and benefits for other teachers in developing intercultural language learning to give better teaching approach to students in various ways.
3. To other researchers: This study will be useful as basic information for other researchers who want to conduct a study about intercultural language learning more comprehensively.

### **1.5 Clarification of Terms**

A clear view about some important terms is specifically required to be explained. There are some terms that are considered as key words in this study, namely:

1. Intercultural language learning is a method of teaching a foreign language which involves fusing of language, culture and learning into a single educative approach. It begins with an idea that language, culture and learning are fundamentally interrelated and places this interrelationship at the center of the learning process (Liddicoat et al, 2003). In this study, this term specifically focuses on the teaching of English as a foreign language and its culture in the Indonesian context especially West Java. The study focuses on the implementation of the principles of intercultural language learning that consists of: 1) Active construction, 2) Making connections, 3) Social Interaction, 4) Reflection, and 5) Responsibility;

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2. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Classroom is typically associated with a physical location where the students, under the guidance of teacher, follow a program that is designed to help them learn the target language, even though it is not widely spoken in the community (Ryan, 2012, in Jackson, 2012). In this study this term refers to the process of teaching and learning English at the English Education Department in a state University in West Java.

## **1.6 Organization of the Report**

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction which highlights the basic description of intercultural language learning and the background of conducting this study. The second chapter deals with theoretical framework building and related references for this study. The third chapter describes the methodology that is used to conduct this research. The fourth, chapter elaborates research findings and discussion. The fifth or the last chapter summarizes the findings, present the conclusion of the thesis and provide some suggestions for further research.

## **1.7 Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has presented the introduction of the study, which includes background of the research, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance and the clarification of terms. The background of the research emphasizes the importance of this study that is supported by burning issues and related previous researches. The purpose of the study and the research questions provide interrelated concepts on questioning the problems that would be investigated. The significance of the study mentions the importance of this study

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and how the result of this study can affect some parties. While, the clarification of terms provides specific definitions of terms related to the current study. Finally, the next chapter will present the literature review that frames the study.

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