The Meaning of the International Interchange, 
International Understanding and that Subject

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St. Andrew’ University has supported an international work camp from 1987, in the Indonesian Bali province working with the Protestant Christian Church in Bali, and to build a shelter institution.

The first work camp was carried out in the villages of Melaya and Blimbingsari. Members of the camp stayed with host families in Blimbingsari, and had their meal in the orphanage. The participants worked with the junior high school students during the day, and conducted cultural exchange programs with the children in the orphanage in the evening. The participants resided, and were motivated to communicate through work and the cultural exchange activities.

The participants communicated through three languages throughout the camp experience, Indonesian, Japanese, English as well as gestures. Before the actual camp, the Japanese students had to study Indonesian once a week, in two-hour sessions, for fifteen weeks. In general Balinese and Indonesian are spoken in the Balinese families. Indonesian is also used as an instructional language in primary schools and junior high schools. If a Japanese student could not speak Indonesian, s/he would mainly communicate through gestures. Therefore, when students failed to learn Indonesian, the communication would come to a standstill. As an example,
if Indonesian and Japanese students tried to communicate, and they failed to understand each other, they would break into laughter.

Also, before joining the camp, the Indonesian students had to study Japanese, as well. Therefore both Japanese and Indonesian students could communicate simple or concrete messages in Japanese language and Indonesian. If they wanted to talk about more serious topics, they had to switch into English. English has been a common means of communication during the camping period.

Japanese students study English when they are in junior high school, high school and university, for a total of about eight years. English is a favorite language for many Japanese students. Ideally, there would have been few communication problems among the participants of the camp if they spoke Japanese, Indonesian and English. However the reality was very much different from what it should have been. The students mispronounced some English words making their English difficult to understand, thus they could not interact in English with their co-campers smoothly. Students of the Literature department should have spoken proficient English since English was intensively taught in that department, but they did not master the language and felt uncomfortable speaking the language. It is possible that because they always wanted to speak proper English, demonstrating incorrect English might have embarrassed them and their department. On the other hand students from the sociology department spoke English more actively even though their language contained a large number of errors. It is possible that this is because they are from non-English related department, and they might think that it would be appropriate for them to speak inaccurate English, and thus there
The Meaning of the International Interchange, International Understanding and that Subject was less psychological burden among this group of the students.

One day we visited an elementary school and demonstrated a communication game to the children and the teachers. First, a representative from the Japanese students explained the role of game in English and exchanged gestures. Then an Indonesian student explained the game in Indonesian language. When the game done with children, it was started from English→Indonesian→English. For those who could not speak English this would start from Japanese → English → Indonesian → English → Japanese. The game proceeded using that method. The participants were all impressed and enjoyed the game. This game focused mostly on cultural exchanges rather than on the ability of the Japanese student to speak perfect English or Indonesian. However this method did not work when they talked about more complex topics. For this reason the committee decided to use a professional interpreter to assist during the Agape Festival and the evaluation session of the work camp.

Why are the Japanese students not skilled speakers of English even though they had been studying English for several years? It seems that the emotional factor has obstructed the learning process and interfered with the ability of the students to master a foreign language. Once I observed English class and my impression confirmed this hypothesis. How can English be taught in Japan if emotion as an essential factor that contributes to the obstruction of learning?

When such an argument is made, protest may arise from English educators. They might say that learners of English are incompetent. They would feel discouraged and weak. It seems to me that successful English
education cannot occur in this type of environment. English teaching in Japan mostly focuses on grammar and reading comprehension. This approach does not improve the learners’ English conversational skills.

I have ever heard that junior high school English teachers who could speak only a few words often expected to improve their English remarkably after traveling overseas. However, their English did not improve as expected because they felt uncomfortable verbalizing their non-native English, and always wanted to speak proper English. Reacting to that failure, the communicative approach and oral communicative English had been adopted in Japan. Hopefully, by applying this new approach in teaching English in Japan, Japanese would be able to master and speak English as other people in the rest of the world.

There are some factors that need to be taken into account to when a foreign language is learned. Isolated learning does not produce a competent speaker of English. Even though they study English for a long period of time, there are very limited situations in Japan where English is naturally spoken. What we need to consider more carefully is the content of language learning. As we know a language is the means of communication. It is used to communicate ideas, feelings, intentions and understanding. The content of language teaching can offer a better understanding of the world to students. Knowledge of the Indonesian culture, tradition and the nation needs to be the contents of the language teaching before the participants join the work camp. Next they have to have a strong desire to understand their counterpart’s personality, behavior, emotion, culture and conditions. The students may understand linguistic knowledge easily but they will not speak English without having
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The English ability of the Indonesian students is higher in comparison with that of the Japanese students. These students attend vocational tourism schools whose graduates will be working in the tourist industry. The program requires three years of study. Soon after graduation they will assume positions at airport counters, hotel reception desks, or as ticketing agents. English must be learned through course work on campus, and participating in overseas job training for a period of six months in the sixth semester. If they can’t speak English proficiently, they cannot participate in the job training. As a result they will not be qualified for employment opportunities. For them English is important and crucial, the situation very different from the Japanese students.

The Indonesian students speak the Balinese language or other mother tongue languages. They also begin learning English in Kindergarten then continue in elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school. They also are required to take other elective foreign language classes such as German, French, or Japanese and continue to study these in vocational school or the university.

This practice is deeply related to the traditional culture of mastering music, which greatly influences their lives and gives them considerable happiness. I have also noticed a relationship between a linguistic sense of pitch and musical pitches in Indonesian students.

Indonesian children have very good language learning environment. The children’s language environment is richly constructed for them in
Indonesia. Moreover, learning a foreign language is indispensable to realize
their life goals and life designs. Their motivation to learn foreign languages
and their language competency is much higher than that of Japanese
students. How would you manage English teaching for Japanese students
to make it as effective as the situation in Indonesia?

The State Polytechnic of Bali is a vocational institution providing
practical skills for its students. They design curricula by considering
theory and the balance of practical skills. This curriculum, called
competency-based curriculum, emphasizes the mastery of certain
competencies. To achieve the goals of the curriculum facilities, teaching
aids, and materials needed for education activities are provided. All
facilities provided are similar to those in the actual work place giving the
students a familiarity with the business environment.

I have come to know a person in charge to teaching English and have
asked him to write of his experiences in teaching English in Bali. His
name is Mr. Budarma. He is one of the English teachers in the state
Polytechnic of Bali. His current position is as the head of curriculum. His
official salary is quite low, and but his supplements his income from other
types of work. For his part-time jobs he is a corporate trainer providing
English classes in hotels and restaurants; he also runs a small boutique
school called the Bali International Language Academy. His academy
provides Indonesian Business culture and Indonesian classes for
expatriates working in Indonesia, and English for Indonesian professionals.
He has various overseas teaching experiences. He has considerable
experience teaching foreigners English and Indonesian.
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He was born and raised in a small poor village called Pancasari, Buleleng regency, in the northern part of Bali. In his village there is an international golf course jointly owned by Japanese and Indonesian investors called Bali Handara Kosaido Country Club. In 1975 to 1977 he worked as a part-time caddy. Inspired by his job as a caddy, he became interested in learning English. He started learning English by himself by using simple phrase books sold in the village market. In 1977 he moved to a village called Blimbingsari and stayed in the second orphanage. He stayed there for three years to finish junior high school in the Bali church. After finishing junior high school he was transferred to the first orphanage, in Denpasar. He studied in the Christian high school as well. Then he continued his study at English Department in Udayana University, Faculty of letters. Soon after his graduation in 1988 he was hired as an English teacher in the state Polytechnic of Bali.

During his service he has given opportunities to develop his professionalism through overseas training. He took his TESOL certificate IV in Perth, Australia and school management in Manila. His current position is the head of curriculum; chairman of the Language competency Unit and a member of Campus development and research team.