



Malaysian English Language Teaching Association



AsiaTEFL

**12th International Conference and
23rd MELTA International Conference**

28 - 30 August 2014

**Borneo Convention Centre
Kuching Sarawak, Malaysia**

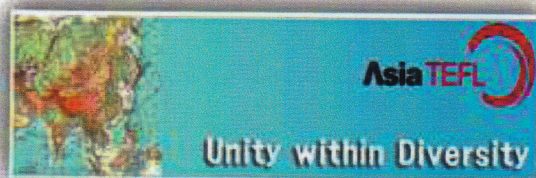
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Evolving Policies, Innovating Practices, Transforming Learning**

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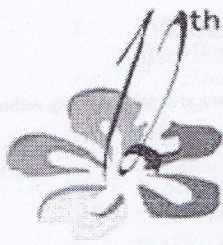


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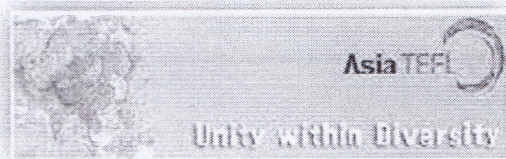
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Developing Sustainable Quality in English Language Education:
Evolving Policies, Innovating Practices, Transforming Learning

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THE PROBLEMS OF TEACHING CROSS CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING IN INDONESIA: POSSIBILITIES WITHIN LIMITATIONS

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KEYWORDS: culture, EFL, cultural background, CCU

ABSTRACT

Language and culture are inseparable—consequently when people learn a certain language, English as a foreign language for example, they have to be familiar with the culture of the people whose language being learnt. However, as English now belongs to the world as its lingua franca, spoken by several different nationalities, the problem of introducing culture into English as Foreign Language (EFL) learning and teaching is perplexing. In Indonesia, the problem of incorporating culture into the EFL learning and teaching even becomes more challenging due to some considerations. The problem of whose culture to be taught is not easy to resolve. This is because, in Indonesia, EFL teachers should be familiar with not only the culture of the target language (which is not clear yet) but also the culture of the learners who come from different islands and consequently the learners bring different cultural backgrounds into the classroom. The EFL learning and teaching will work effectively when the learners are aware of both their own culture and the culture of the target language. Another challenging problem of teaching Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) could be inadequate knowledge of the teachers on how to behave in the culture of the target language. In addition, the limited time of exposure to the use of English in real life situation, and the lack of authentic resources could be other potential problems. This conceptual paper will also discuss the background of teaching CCU, and tentative solutions of the current problems will also be a part of the discussion.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Many experts believe (Sadtono, 2000; Dobrovol'skij, D and E.Piirainem, 2006; Williams, 2010, Sultana, 2011) that language is inseparable with its culture. Hence teaching language means also teaching culture and only by understanding the culture of the target language (TL) will a language learner be able to function properly the language being learnt. Dimitrious Thanasoulas (2001) claimed that foreign language teaching means foreign culture teaching and in one form or another, culture has, even explicitly, been taught in the foreign language classroom. What is debatable at the moment is that since English belongs to the world as its lingua franca; spoken by different nationalities with different cultural backgrounds; the teaching of whose culture to be taught become perplexing. It is not wise to introduce only British, American, New Zealand, and Australia cultures due to the assumption that these four countries are considered the English speaking countries

In Indonesian context, introducing culture in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) learning and teaching even becomes more complicated. This is due to the fact that Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) teachers in Indonesia have to be familiar with not only the culture of the target language (TL) but also the culture of the learners who come from different cultural backgrounds. It goes without saying, they will bring different cultures to the classroom, hence they have different views at looking at the same thing. The EFL learning and teaching would be successful when the learners and teachers are aware of both their own culture and those of the TL.

Another problem of teaching CCU in Indonesia is the teacher qualification. Most of the teachers are unprepared to teach CCU in the EFL context as they are not prepared to teach it.

In other words, there is no department at university levels majoring in CCU. They usually do not get skills for teaching it from formal education (CCU department in universities), but they learn from some sources (books, journals or other medias) which might deviate from the real target culture. In addition, the lack of authentic resources and the limited time of exposure to the use of English can also be problems of teaching it. Though teaching CCU in Indonesia seems very perplexing, there are still possibilities within limitations to increase awareness of the importance of incorporating culture in the foreign language learning and teaching. By this way, it is expected that the EFL learners could benefit from incorporating it into the learning and teaching process

2.0 DEFINITION OF CULTURE

Defining culture is not a simple matter as different writers have defined culture differently and consequently there are some possible definitions of what culture is. According to Trifonovitch (cited in Croft, 1980), survey reveals over 450 different definitions of the word or concept of culture available in literature. Though defining culture is perplexing, the development of incorporating culture into the English as Foreign Language (EFL) learning and teaching leads us to a current understanding of culture that will be briefly summarized here.

Tomalin and Stempleski (1998) propose two categories of the definition of culture. For them, culture can be categorized as big-C culture and little-c culture. Big-C culture, also called "achievement culture" comprises history, geography, institutions, literature, music and the way of life. Little-c culture which is also called "behavior culture" mainly deals with behavior, including culturally-influenced beliefs and perceptions, especially as expressed through language and cultural behavior that affect acceptability in the host country. Another writer, Weaver (1986) divides culture into internal and external culture. He says that internal culture, being a subjective knowledge, is the culture that can be learnt implicitly and unconsciously. While external one, being an objective knowledge, is the culture which can be learnt consciously and explicitly. The internal culture is usually difficult to change, such as values and thought patterns while external one could change easily, such as behavior and language.

It is indeed not easy to make satisfactory definition of culture as culture embraces so many things, tangible and intangible and it is also dynamic which means cultures change in time and place and much of culture can be seen as a series of dynamic tensions (Martin Cortazzi, 2000). In addition, Vallete in Valdes (1986) divides culture in general into two major components: anthropological or sociological culture and the history of civilization. The first component includes attitudes, customs, daily activities, ways of thinking, values and frame of reference of a people; and the second component comprises geography, history, and achievements in science and technology, the social sciences, and the arts. In this case, language belongs to the first component as it is a tool to understand and appreciate the concerned society (Sadtono, 2000).

For our purpose in this discussion, culture will cover everything that is learnt, which shapes a way of life. It influences the way people think and how they express that thought through a language (Rizfi, 1990). According to Wardhaugh (1987), culture is whatever a person must know or believe in order to function in a particular society. The society always uses a language as a means of communication. That is why language and culture cannot be separated. When the learners learn a language without reference to its culture, they just learn words/expressions in isolation. As the consequence, misunderstanding might happen due to different concepts of looking at the same thing.

3.0 LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

When talking about language and culture, American linguists Edward Sapir (1884-1939) and one of his students, Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941) should be taken into account. Their

general idea is what has become known as Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which has two version: strong and moderate (Sampson.1980).

It is claimed that the way people perceive the world is completely determined by their native language (strong version) and the moderate version is the way people view the world is determined partly by the structure of their native language. This paper will apply the moderate version since the strong one is generally rejected for lack of empirical support.

As a part of culture, language cannot be learnt in isolation from its culture, meaning that language and culture to some extent are inseparable. When people learn a language they also have to look at the culture of the people whose language they are learning (Tomassouw, 1986). Even as simple as colors, different cultures have different views. Madurese (one of the tribes in Indonesia), for example, does not have "green". Instead, they use "blue" for both green and blue. For them the color of the leaf is not green but blue. So it is common among Madurese when they say in Indonesian a blue leaf instead of a green one (Salikin, 2009). This could be because people sometimes cannot directly translate color terms from one language to another (Wardhaugh, 1987). In other words, every language has its own way in describing colors.

The following story could be an illustration of the importance of understanding the relation between language and culture. There was a car accident between Kobayashi, a Japanese woman visiting United States, and Keller an American in a busy intersection. Kobayashi was understandably surprised when Keller turned left without signaling. Keller bumped in her car. A police officer who did not see the accident overheard Kobayashi saying to Keller "I am very sorry". The police gave Kobayashi a \$40 ticket but Keller was not cited (Irving, 1984). Why did the police give Kobayashi not Keller a ticket? This is because of cultural differences in the perceived meaning and contextual appropriateness of "I am sorry". In this case, the police interpreted her response as admitting blame for the accident because in the United States when one says "I am sorry" this means that the person is accepting responsibility. Conversely, in Japan, "I am sorry" means I am sorry this happens without admitting any blame.

Furthermore, Susan's story in Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) is another example of the fact that language and culture are intertwined; they cannot be separated. Susan is an American woman and stayed overnight for the first time with Japanese family in Japan. After dinner, his hosts invited her to take a bath but Susan rejected by saying that she was not in a hurry to do so. In Japanese culture, a guest staying with a family is honored and even in taking a bath the guest will be invited first and the members of the family will do later and they will never do first. Susan could speak Japanese fluently but she committed a critical accident that is a cultural blunder or a situation where there is a communication problem between people of different cultures. In fact, Susan failed to realize that her hosts actually hinted that it was bedtime and in Japanese culture one should take a bath before bedtime. As a guest, Susan should take a bath first so that the members of the host family could do after her. In this accident, Susan was proficient linguistically, but culturally poor.

Despite the best efforts of Kobayashi's and Susan's English teachers, they (like some English learners in Indonesia) might be more familiar with the structure, pronunciation, stress, and intonation of the English language than with the more abstract things that are very important in a particular cultural context. It is not exaggerated to say that English teachers must be trained to make the learners able to successfully communicate inter culturally. If culture embodies language, it is inevitable that teaching language means also teaching its culture.

4.0 THE TEACHING OF CROSS CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

General goals of teaching Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) in an English as Foreign Language (EFL) context is to break down cross-cultural misunderstanding by introducing the culture of people whose language is being learnt. By doing so, it is expected that language learners could eliminate prejudices and develop tolerance toward other cultures. Historically, Risager in Byram and Fleming (1998), states that the development of teaching cross-cultural understanding has evolved as the following stages. The first stage is Foreign-Cultural Approach the second is the

Intercultural Approach followed by the Multicultural Approach and finally is the Transcultural Approach.

In 1980s the Foreign-Cultural Approach started and in this approach the focus of teaching is a single culture of specific people whose language being learnt. The main goal of this approach is to make the language learner have communicative and cultural competence. By this approach, the learner is expected to have those competencies like native speakers of the people whose language being learnt. This means that this approach does not deal with the culture of the learners and consequently the target language has higher status compared to the learner's. The danger is that the learner might admire the target culture and look down his own.

The second approach is the Intercultural-approach aiming at the incorporating between the learner's own culture and the target culture. By this approach the learner is expected to be aware of his or her own culture and the importance of his or her own culture should be taken into consideration. The main aim of this approach is to introduce the learner an attitude of cultural relativism that is a non-ethnocentric view when confronted with other cultures. This theory claims that a culture can only be understood on its own term. This means that standards, attitudes and beliefs from one culture should not be used to judge other cultures. According to this theory, there are no universal cultural beliefs or values so that a non-ethnocentric view when confronted with other cultures becomes the focus on this approach.

The Multicultural Approach is the approach which is based on the fact that several cultures may co-exist within the boundaries of one and the same society. The main aim of this approach is balanced and anti-racist view of the cultures involved, and the communicative as well as intercultural competence to use the target language as a lingua franca with native speakers and non-native speakers alike. The latest approach is the Transcultural Approach aiming at understanding globalization which leads to the growing importance of cross-cultural contacts between learners where the target language is a lingua franca (Sadtono, 1999).

Though each of this approach has been used as the basis for CCU teaching, perplexing question still exists; should CCU be taught in foreign language learning and teaching? Those who are in favor of teaching CCU believe that familiarity with cultural aspect of the people whose language being learnt will help learners learn a foreign language better. This is because learning a new language does not only relate to linguistic competence but also cultural one. While those who are not in favor of teaching CCU have their own arguments. The most complicated question is "whose culture is going to be taught in the EFL context?". This is a reasonable question due to the fact that English now is a global language; spoken by people from different nationalities with different cultural backgrounds.

4.1 The Proponents of Teaching Cross-Cultural Understanding in English as Foreign Language Context

Long time ago Politzer (as cited by Brook, 1964) pointed out that as language teachers we must be interested in the study of culture not because we necessarily want to teach the culture of other countries, but because we have to teach it. If we teach language without teaching at the same time the culture in which it operates, we are teaching meaningless symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning. This is because cultural differences are the main issues in cross-cultural education. Without recognizing differences in traditions and habits among people of different ethnics, religions, localities, regions, countries and nations, confusion and misunderstanding will continually recur in communication with other communities. This is important to consider as the goal of teaching Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) is to help students acquire attitudes, knowledge and skills needed to successfully function within their own micro-culture, mainstream culture, and global community (Sinagatullin, 2003).

There are some fundamental reasons why teaching CCU in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) context is inevitable. First, language and culture to some extent cannot be separated; they are intertwined. Thus, it is unavoidable that teaching language must also involve teaching culture of the

people whose language being learnt. Brown (1987) states that language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language, the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture. One's mastery of the linguistic elements of language does not guarantee a person can communicate through it. Previous examples of Kobayashi and Susan stories show that linguistic competence does not guarantee that one could communicate in a certain language successfully.

The second reason for the inevitability of introducing cultural aspects into the EFL learning and teaching is the fact that language teaching means also culture teaching. Valdes (1986) states that every language lesson is about something and that something is cultural. Buttjes (1990) explains how language teaching is culture teaching. It is said that language code cannot be taught in isolation without becoming aware of the complex and numerous processes of intercultural mediation that any foreign language learner undergoes. Susan and Kobayashi prove that linguistic facility alone does not guarantee effective communication. In addition Morain cited in Sadtono (1999.p.49) suggests "in order to really understand , we must be able to hear the silent message and read the invisible words." These silent messages and invisible words are reflected in the culture.

The third reason why introducing cultural matters into the EFL learning and teaching is important is that major goal of a foreign language program is the mastery of communicative competence. In order to communicate successfully with the speakers of another language, one needs a sound grasp of the background knowledge of the target culture. Long time ago, Pilitzer (1959) claimed that if we do not teach language as well as its culture, we are teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which the learners attach the wrong meaning. Thus, EFL learning is to some extent, a foreign culture learning. In short, those who are in favor of teaching CCU in the EFL context believe that introducing culture is obligatory as it could help the learners minimize misunderstanding when communicating in the TL.

4.2 Arguments Against Teaching Cross-Cultural Understanding in English as Foreign Language Context

It is true that the first argument against teaching Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) context is the fact that English is now a global language, spoken widely by people from different cultural backgrounds and thus whose culture to be taught is dubious (Sadtono, 2000). It goes without saying, it is not easy for EFL teachers to decide whose culture should be incorporated in the learning and teaching process. In fact, the English native speakers from UK, America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand rightfully claim to have their own cultures. The problem of whose culture to be taught might be resolved when the learners have already decided to visit a certain particular country. The culture of this definite country must be prioritized to be incorporated in the EFL context.

Another argument of those who are not in favor of teaching CCU in the EFL context is the fear of cultural and linguistic imperialism. The cultural and linguistic imperialism of English for example can have some effects. It has become the language of power and prestige in many countries, thus acting as a crucial gatekeeper to social and economic progress, its widespread use threatens other languages. Besides, its use in particular domains, especially professional, may exacerbate different power relationships and may render these domains more inaccessible to many people (Pennycook, 1994).

In addition, those who are against teaching CCU claim that English of science and technology is free from cultural background. Kaplan in Valdes (1986) states that English of science and technology is more closely affiliated with science and technology than with culture of any national society such as America, British, Australia, and New Zealand. According to him, scientific and technical written text has developed a separate culture of its own. Although this scientific culture tends to be expressed through English at the present time, it is in no way inextricably bound to English and in this case English is free of the culture of a particular society.

The last problem of teaching CCU is the issue of cultural relativism. Cultural relativism is defined as the theory that culture can only be understood in its own term. That is why, standards, attitudes, beliefs from one culture should not be used in the study or description of another culture (*The Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics*, 1997). People should not judge other cultures based on their own as every culture is right in its own way.

In summary, those who are not in favor of teaching CCU are convinced that introducing culture of the people whose language is learnt is not a simple matter. There are several things should be taken into consideration when teaching CCU. The problems could be the question of the appropriate culture to be taught, the fear of linguistic and cultural imperialism, the questions of English for science and technology, and the problem of linguistic relativism.

5.0 TEACHING CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING IN INDONESIA

5.1 The Existing Problems

Generally speaking, the biggest problem of teaching Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) context now is the fact that English, being a lingua franca, does not belong to just one country. As Crystal (1997) states that there are about 35 nations claiming that English as their first language. Consequently they will bring their own cultures when speaking English. The crucial question then is "whose culture do learners have to learn?". Since most of EFL learners in Indonesia do not know which countries they will visit, or even they will never visit English speaking countries, the problem of introducing the target culture becomes more perplexing.

In Indonesian context, the most perplexing problem of teaching CCU is the fact that Indonesia is a multicultural country having more than 13.000 islands, with a lot of ethnic groups and many different cultures and languages. Thus it is not easy for the teachers to learn their student cultures who come from different part of Indonesia as they practice and share varied cultures. The implication is that, in order to teach EFL successfully teachers need to have a good understanding of the different cultures shared by the learners. This requirement is not easy, or even impossible, to do looking at the fact that EFL classroom in Indonesia usually is a large class with learners coming from different cultural backgrounds. Consequently, the students bring different cultures which evoke different ways of thinking and behaving. In addition, in developing countries (with reference to Indonesia), the availability of the authentic materials, which are of importance in teaching CCU, is hard to provide. They might be available in big cities, but most of the teachers and learners are not able to afford them.

The followers of the Whorfian hypothesis would argue that it is the native language categorizes things differently, meaning that different ethnics having different local languages would view the same thing differently. For example, the word "beautiful" has different imagination between Javanese and "Dayak" tribe in Central Kalimantan. A beautiful lady for Javanese is one whose eyes flicker like an oil lamp, whose gait is like a hungry tiger. However, for "Dayak", the beautiful woman is one whose ears are very long with big ear-lobes which account for the wearing of heavy earrings (Sadtono, 1999). In this case, it is difficult to introduce the concept of a beautiful woman to both Javanese and "Dayak" students as these both ethnics perceive the beautiful women differently. Another example is the fact that the meaning of "delicious meal" differs for people in Central Java and East Java. For those in central Java, delicious meal is related to "sweet", whereas in East Java delicious means something "a bit salty".

The next problem of teaching CCU in Indonesia is the teachers' qualification. There is no any department at University level prepares the students for teaching CCU. This means all CCU teachers are not majoring in CCU when they completed their study. It goes without saying their qualification in teaching CCU is questionable. Furthermore, in Indonesia, CCU teaching is not combined with the normal EFL teaching, meaning that it is provided as a separate subject. According to Kramsch (1993) teaching CCU should take place within the normal language class,

not a separate subject. In addition, CCU teaching is usually conducted once a week and this time allotment is limited resulting at the minimal amount to be taught.

Overseas residence is also problem for teaching CCU in Indonesia. It is true that when students want to understand target culture better, they have to stay at the target countries sometime. The EFL students at developed countries are usually sent to the foreign countries and live there. According to Sadtono (1999.p.50), in the UK this overseas residence is called "one-year abroad". He believes that it is impossible if the students from developing countries have to do the same as they simply could not afford it, except those on scholarship or whose parents are extremely wealthy. They might do short visits but they might not be beneficial from the cultural viewpoint, as in order to understand another culture they should stay in the target country at least one year. Sadtono also states that after staying for one year in the target country, students would be able to observe the full cycle of cultural life and this must be more costly compared to the short visits. However, Coleman in Byram and Fleming, (1998) argues that survey results indicate that living overseas does not necessarily mean that the students would be able to eliminate their stereotypes of the people concerned, and some indicate that their stereotypes even worsen.

5.2 The Possible Solutions to the Problems

Answering the question of whose culture to be taught in Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) is one of the keys to cope with the problems. If the target country of the English as Foreign Language (EFL) learner is definite then the answer to the question could be easier to have. For example, when the students learn English because they will visit Australia, the culture to be taught should be focused on Australian culture. This practice is not easy to apply due to the fact that most of EFL learners in Indonesia do not know which country they are going to visit. Even they will never visit English speaking countries. If the goal of teaching English as foreign language is only for reading purposes, the objective of teaching CCU can be narrowed down to help students to increase their understanding of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language (Ned Seelye, 1988).

Making a large class to be smaller could minimize the problem of understanding the learner different cultures. By doing so, it might be easier for the CCU teachers to understand the student different cultural backgrounds which may result in a better learning and teaching process. This could be conducted by qualified CCU teachers. However, it is not easy to do as the number of CCU teachers (especially the qualified ones if any) is very limited. Or, making ethnic group class might be applied to minimise many cultural differences. Nevertheless this practice might result in controversy due to the fact that this practice is against the Indonesian philosophy of "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika," meaning that though Indonesia has many tribes and languages, we have to be one nation, Indonesia.

The availability of CCU materials should be taken into considerations since it is not easy to access. There are not many CCU teaching materials in the market so any materials employ culture and language learning is usually used and this should be done by teachers who are knowledgeable about it. Teacher-made materials might not be practical due to the fact that CCU teachers are overloaded with a mass of work. CCU is only one of the subjects they have to teach. That is why, CCU materials should be provided based on the need analysis and they must be easily accessed. In this case, the Indonesian government, (department of education and culture), is responsible for coping with this problem.

Most of CCU teachers are unprepared to teach CCU, and only a few teachers would qualify as CCU teachers because there is no any department in university level majoring in this field. Consequently, they might teach CCU with very limited knowledge resulting in a questionable learning and teaching process. In Indonesia, a significant number of CCU teachers are still struggling with their own knowledge of CCU. There should be departments at university level majoring in CCU. Or more training could be conducted to make the CCU teachers more qualified. If the teachers themselves are not qualified, how can they be expected to teach CCU.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Looking at the fact that, to a certain extent, language and culture are inseparable, teaching Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) context is unavoidable. It is very often that miscommunication happens not because of linguistic problems but cultural ones. Teaching CCU in the EFL context, with reference to Indonesia, is difficult due to the fact that it relates to some perplexing problems. The question of whose culture to be taught in teaching CCU is not easy to answer as the EFL learners do not have specific target countries to visit. When the EFL learners have clear target countries, then the culture to be taught in CCU could be easier to manage. In addition, it is not easy for CCU teachers to understand the learner cultures because they are coming from different ethnics bringing different cultural backgrounds.

Another main problem of teaching CCU in Indonesia is teacher qualifications which are still questionable. This condition is understandable because they are not prepared to teach it. They did not major in CCU when completing their study. That is why, more training to improve their CCU knowledge is a must. In addition, the availability of the CCU materials is also a problem. It is not easy for the CCU teachers to find authentic materials for teaching CCU. Most of the CCU materials (if any) are provided in big cities and both teachers and learners usually are usually not able to afford them. That is why some good CCU teachers often use any materials related to culture and consequently they might mislead. Finally, the problems of teaching CCU in the EFL context might not only belong to Indonesia but also other developing countries where English is taught as a foreign language.

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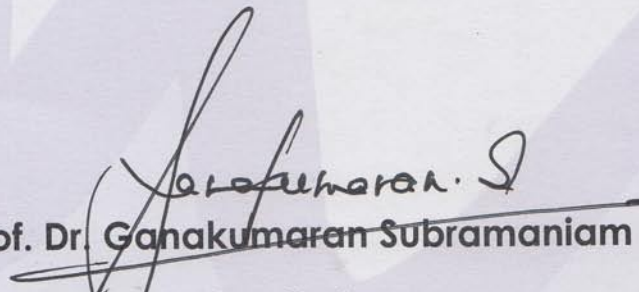
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