

## **ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN INDONESIA AND ITS RELATION TO THE ROLE OF ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE**

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### **Abstract:**

Since Indonesia is categorized as an English Foreign Language (EFL) country, it is interesting to find out whether this issue has an impact on English Language Teaching practices in this country. This article describes general trends of English Language Teaching in Indonesia last few decades and discusses whether rapid globalization of English has any significant impact on English as an International Language (EIL) policy and practices in this country, and also whether new trends in English as an International Language (EIL) influence perception of and toward English in this country.

**Keywords:** English Language Teaching (ELT), English as an International Language (EIL)

### **INTRODUCTION**

With the emergence of today's role of English as an International language (EIL) and as a global lingua franca (ELF), it is hardly surprising that English language education has become important in many countries. Indonesia, for example, has growing number of schools range from kindergarten to university level which use English as the medium of instruction (Dardjowidjojo, 2002, cited in Zacharias, 2003). Also, the number of English courses rapidly increases as a result of high interest of people in learning English. English is viewed by many people in Indonesia, for instance, as a requirement imposed by globalization (Zacharias, 2003; Yuwono, 2005). In response to this international role of English language, ideally teaching and learning English should be matched with appropriate pedagogical approach, in this case, EIL pedagogy approaches. As McKay (2003, p.1) suggests, "teaching of English as an International language (EIL)

should be based on an entirely different set of assumptions than has typically informed English Language Teaching (ELT) pedagogy”. In other words, teaching and learning EIL should be different from teaching and learning of any other second or foreign languages.

Since Indonesia is categorized as an EFL country, it is interesting to find out whether this issue has an impact on ELT practices in this country. Therefore, this article describes general trends of ELT in Indonesia last few decades and discusses whether rapid globalization of English has any significant impact on EIL policy and practices in this country, and also whether new trends in EIL influence perception of and toward English in this country.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **General trends of ELT in Indonesia**

General trends of ELT in Indonesia can be described by looking at background and status of English, English language education and its curriculum, problems of ELT and recent development of English language teaching in Indonesia.

### **Background and status of English and other languages in Indonesia**

As many people are aware that there can be more than one language and culture within one island of Indonesia because Indonesia consists of multi ethnic groups with hundred different local languages spread over different parts of Indonesia. Hence, generally each individual speaks two languages, a local language (Bahasa Daerah such as Javanese, Ambonese, etc) and national language (Bahasa Indonesia). Both Nababan (1982, cited in Nur, 2004) and Dardjowidjojo (2000) classify languages used in Indonesia into three categories. They are vernacular/local languages (Bahasa Daerah), national languages (Bahasa Indonesia) and foreign languages. The first category is usually used as family languages for social communication in their regions. Moreover, as Dardjowidjojo (2000) states, most Indonesian children at individual level in regional areas learn their vernaculars as their mother tongue before they learn ‘Bahasa Indonesia’ (the national language) at school. The national language is used in formal and business communication and is also used to communicate with other Indonesians of different language backgrounds. For international communication, people use a foreign language.

Lowenberg (1991), Dardjowidjojo (2000) and Nur (2004) believe that the policy-maker had been aware of the potential of English and its utility in every international domain as well as in the economic development of Indonesia. In fact, English was either dominant language or second language of Indonesia’s immediate neighbors such as Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, and Australia. Thus, due to its utility as world language and its utility as lingua franca of immediate geographical region, English was eventually chosen as the first foreign language rather than Dutch (although it was the colonial language). In addition, Dardjowidjojo (2000) explains that the term English as the first foreign language is used and not as second language because most Indonesians are

bilingual with Indonesia as the national language (second language) and local / vernacular language as the mother tongue. Also, both Dardjowidjojo (2000) and Nur (2004) asserts that this status of English as the first foreign language remains today in Indonesia. However, Lowenberg (1991) claims that due to the functions of English in the linguistic repertoires of many Indonesians, English is seen as an additional language in Indonesia.

### **English language education in Indonesia**

In Indonesia educational system, English instruction begins in secondary (high) schools. According to 1967 Decree of the Ministry of Education and Culture (now known as the Department of National Education), the role of English in high schools was “to speed up national development in addition to establishing relationship with other nations and to carrying out its national foreign policy” (Nur, 2004, p.179). Therefore, English is compulsory subject for these two levels. It is also one of the subjects that students have to take in their final examinations.

Every junior high school students study English for 136 contact hours each year in which each contact hour equal with 45 minutes (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Nur, 2004). By the end of the third year, students would have studied English for 408 contact hours on average. Hence, by the students complete their senior high school education; they would have studied English for more than 800 contact hours. As stated in 1967 Decree, the primary objective of English instruction in secondary schools was to provide a well-developed reading skills to facilitate transfer of science and technology knowledge because around 75% to 90% of scientific and technical textbooks and reference materials are still available only in English (Nur, 2004; Lowenberg, 1991) Speaking skills on the other hand, was given low priority because it was considered to be a luxury and also it was assumed that such ability at high school level could endanger national identity (Nur, 2004).

Prior 1994, English was not compulsory at elementary level (primary school). Only after 1994 revised curriculum, Ministry of Education then has allowed elementary schools to include English as a subject for students of grade four, five, and six. However, it seems that only government primary schools in urban areas and private schools would have the staff to teach English. As a result, those primary or elementary schools in rural areas still do not offer English due to shortage of staff able to teach it. In addition, unlike the high school students, English at elementary level is for oral communication only. Thus, the order of emphasis is speaking, listening, reading and writing (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Nur, 2004). English is taught for 60 to 90 minutes a week, depending on resources of individual school (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Nur, 2004).

At the university level, students in non-language departments have to take English for two semesters and for two to three hours a week (Lowenberg, 1991, Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Nur 2004). Based on their explanations, since the goal of English at this level is to assist students to develop their reading ability relates to their fields of study, the kind of English taught is ESP (English for Specific Purposes). While for those majoring in English, the university curriculum is to develop both language skills and

theoretical knowledge (Dardjowidjojo, 2000). He also adds that to obtain a bachelor degree, students should finish their study between 144 to 160 credit hours.

### **Curriculum and policy**

Dardjowidjojo (2000) and Nur (2004) recognize that since independence, Indonesia has experienced several changes in curriculum with different teaching approaches or methods from grammar-translation method and audio-lingual method to communicative approach (which is regarded as the most popular teaching approach). By 1984, the revised curriculum for English in secondary schools had adopted the communicative approach with an emphasis on the development of speaking skills. However, the practice did not reflect the communicative learning (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Musthafa, 2001; Nur, 2004). Therefore, although the four skills remained as the targets for learning, the order of priority was changed to reading as the most important, then listening, writing and speaking.

Ten years later, in 1994, the Ministry of Education produced new curriculum to revise 1984. It is still communicatively oriented, but the official term was the meaning-based curriculum (meaningful approach) (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Musthafa, 2001; Nur, 2004). Nur (2004) explains that this 1994 curriculum for high schools have three types of English syllabuses. They are national content which is required to be implemented nationally and which the purpose is to develop a basic reading skill, enrichment content which provides more exercises in reading comprehension, vocabulary building, control of structures in English and so on, and local content which have materials to meet the needs of students in specific regions in Indonesia such as English for industry, tourism and business/commerce.

The curriculum is not only national, it is also compulsory. Therefore, when a textbook writer or a publisher wants to have his book used by the schools in the country, she or he has to include all the materials stated in the curriculum, including the themes, the grammar, the functions, and the vocabulary items to be learned (Dardjowidjojo, 2000).

Furthermore, the release of Regional Autonomy Laws in 1999 made Indonesia to start its decentralization reform. The laws give autonomy to local governments and schools to have their own policy to manage their educational service provision, including English language education. This decentralization reform at school level is believed to lead to better school performance, greater school autonomy, better match between the services delivered and the students' needs, greater parental and community involvement and greater participants in decision making (Depdiknas, 2003, cited in Yuwono, 2005).

### **Problems of ELT in Indonesia**

Since English was first taught, there have been problems in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Indonesia and the learning of English has been considered less of success in this country. Some Indonesian scholars (such as Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Musthafa, 2001; Nur, 2004 and Yuwono, 2005) and some non-

Indonesian scholars (such as Kirkpatrick, 2007 and Kam, 2004) have portrayed it in this way. Although the curriculum plays important role in maintaining standards in ELT, most of the major problems seem to lie outside the curriculum. Both Dardjowidjojo (2000) and Nur (2004) agree on five common problems such as big class sizes, teachers with low level of English proficiency, the low salary of government English teachers which encourage or even force many to moonlight, the lack of sufficient preparation to teach the new curriculum and the culture barriers for teachers to leave the role of master and to accept or to adopt the new role of facilitator. They also claims that the large class sizes and unqualified English teachers are two obvious factors that contribute to the ongoing problems in ELT in Indonesia. Musthafa (2001) also lists other reasons for the problems such as limited time allocated for teaching English; lack opportunity to actually practice speaking English in the classroom due to focus on grammar and syntax and the use of L1/ mother tongue; less authentic materials and lack opportunity to socialize English outside the classroom. According to Yuwono (2005), ELT in Indonesia seems to be always problematic before and after decentralization era. She also suggests that the continually-revised curriculum does not seem to consider factors such as suitable qualifications for teachers and numbers of students nor does it provide strategies and alternatives.

Related to ability in English, Dardjowidjojo (2000) assumes that the number of hours a student spends in secondary school and the optional hours in elementary school should at least have resulted in a high ability in English by the time she/ he graduate from senior high school. The outcome, however, is far from the expectation. It seems that a high school graduate is unable to communicate intelligibly in English and those who are able is suspected of having taken private courses or come from a certain family background (Dardjowidjojo, 2000). Kam (2004, p.8) sees that this low ability in English is as a result of a “flip-flopping” in ELT methods or approaches in Indonesia (from grammar-translation method to communicative approach).

Moreover, the ELT situation in university level is similar. Kirkpatrick (2007) suggests that as the entry level of most students is very low, the ESP class focuses on grammar and translation. Thus, most of ESP programs fail to develop students’ proficiency in English. In agreement with Kirkpatrick (2007), Nur (2004) asserts that university graduates who have studied six years of English in both junior and senior high schools and another year in university generally cannot communicate adequately in English. In private elementary schools, on the other hand, the ELT practice is much different. As reported by Sadtono (1997, cited in Kam, 2004) that children in one school in Surabaya that taught English from grade one was able to write fairly good compositions when they were in grade five and six. He believes that this was due to the teacher who used integrated approach. Unfortunately, this success in private elementary school could be difficult to be continuously applied in other elementary schools either in public schools or elementary schools in rural areas as the introduction of ELT at this level is still confined to some selected elementary schools in urban areas.

### **Recent Development of ELT in Indonesia**

Despite the problems of ELT practice in Indonesia, English continues to be the most popular foreign language in Indonesia schools. Since 1994, ELT has been introduced from grade four of elementary level in public schools. With a reorientation objective in 1994 (which is regarded to be important in ELT in Indonesia in the last few years), the focus has been on listening and speaking skills in elementary schools and on speaking and reading skills in secondary schools.

Furthermore, the language policy for education in Indonesia has made English language learning compulsory. Although the policy has attributed teaching English from early grades in elementary schools, it has not been fully implemented largely because of lack of primary teachers both in numbers and skills level.

However, overall, there has been an attempt in the last ten years to strengthen and improve the ELT through curriculum revision and development as well as decentralization reform.

### **Generalization of ELT in Indonesia (some trends and issues)**

It can be seen through the previous discussion that the general situation of formal ELT in Indonesia is rather discouraging. Practitioners, language experts and policy makers agree that teaching of English in Indonesia has not been a success over the past few decades (Dardjowidjojo, 1996b cited in Nur, 2004). This condition is also stated in some scholars' finding in their journal article of ELT in Indonesia such as Dardjowidjojo (2000), Musthafa (2001), Nur (2004), Kirkpatrick (2007) and Kam (2004).

However, the problems concerning ELT in Indonesia seem to be a complex matter. As Nur (2004) states that it is not easy to identify the real cause of ELT's lack of success. It seems that the policy and practice of ELT in Indonesia is not likely to change much. As Nur (2004) suggests that although change is inevitable in today's fast changing world, no dramatic changes are expected in Indonesia. Thus, she argues that the practice of English instruction will continue as it has been always the case. There is less that can be done to improve the teaching of English in Indonesian schools as there are other more pressing priorities such as political and economic problems.

Unlike Nur, Dardjowidjojo (2000) sees the failure in teaching English in Indonesia as a common phenomenon in EFL countries. Thus, there is no need to be pessimistic.

Furthermore, Kam (2004) summarizes the issue of ELT in Indonesia in terms of dilemma. He explains that on the one hand, Indonesia faces a shortage of English teachers and on the other, those currently teaching English would need to improve qualitatively. This is what he called by "quantitative vs qualitative dilemma" (Kam, 2004, p.28). He suggests that limited resources have to be distributed between recruiting and training more teachers of English and providing in-service training for those who have already teaching English in schools.

## **Impact of new trend in EIL on attitude toward and perception of English in Indonesia**

Based on Kirkpatrick project and Zacharias study, it appears that the choice of local cultures and concerns may have reflected the need of Indonesians to talk about these, given the extraordinary social, political, and cultural changes that Indonesians were experiencing at the time. Also, this need can be seen from the release of recent school-based curriculum in 2006. This emphasis on Indonesian cultures also support Nur argument (2004, p.185) when she said “there is always sense of apprehension that the widespread use of English will severely impede the development of ‘Bahasa Indonesia’ and push aside local cultures”. McKay (2003) also sees that today in a country where English as an additional language, there is a growing importance of including the local cultures.

Moreover, from Zacharias study, it seems clear that native-speakerism still exists in ELT in Indonesia, and in her case, it existed in the teachers’ belief. However, in their teaching practice, it appears that most teachers have already started to move from native speaker paradigm (although it is not much) such as in the issue of culture in ELT, materials for reading that is preferred from local source materials and the use of mother tongue. Many respondents also imply unconsciously that native speaker teachers have weakness such as in teaching grammar; therefore, they prefer native speaker teachers to teach only speaking and pronunciation. Thus, I agree with Matsuda’s suggestion (2003) about teacher education of World Englishes. In this case, if those kinds of teachers (in Zacharias study) are given training to be introduced to the issue about EIL by taking a World Englishes course or an English sociolinguistics course that the scope is not limited to English speaking countries, they are more likely to be open minded and are aware of the realities of the spread of English as an international language. Also, it seems apparent that without this, it is difficult for teachers to have total paradigm shift.

In addition, Dardjowidjojo (2000) states that in the past, people preferred British English to American English. However, political and economic domination seem to have changed this attitude. He also asserts that Indonesian government actually has no special policy on the variety to be taught. The only guideline used is that it must be consistent. Furthermore, with the current emphasis on fluency rather than accuracy, Indonesians have begun to accept non-native variety of English ( Dardjowidjojo, 2000). Thus, actually, the new trends of EIL have a potential place in Indonesia as long as there is a way to raise people awareness about the role of EIL in global society such as teacher education toward EIL and the use of media (Matsuda, 2003).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the general picture of formal ELT in Indonesia is indeed discouraging and has been characterized by failure. However, with a rapid globalization of English, as Dardjowidjojo (2000) states, Indonesians have begun to accept non-native varieties of English. Also, more people, although not much, have already started to move from native speakerism such as by having the idea that local cultures are more appropriate to form basis for textbook content rather than target cultures.

Although EIL policy and practice in Indonesia seems difficult to be applied in formal education due to factors like curriculum, government control, and more pressing priorities, EIL could be tried to be introduced and implemented through places such as private schools, English courses, or university where the curriculum does not depend on the government and also through the use of media such as internet in English courses or in extracurricular activities at schools.

Therefore, although it seems difficult and takes a long time, there is a chance for Indonesians to change their attitude toward English in the light of EIL as long as there is a continuous exposure to ELT in Indonesia not only through formal education, a change in the government in issuing teaching visa not to English speaking countries only, and the use of media such as internet.



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