

English Language Teaching Praxes and Policies in Indonesia: A Critical Review

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Abstract

This study aimed to expose English language teaching practices and policies in Indonesia. This study employed a qualitative approach in the form of document analysis. Analyses were conducted on books, research papers, national policies, and curricular documents. From the inaugural curriculum in 1947 to the present curriculum in 2013, the Indonesian government has provided financing for English language teaching. In contrast, the 2013 curriculum gives less time to the teaching of the English language than earlier editions. From the perspective of training all Indonesians to become global citizens, language proficiency is required. Therefore, both teachers and students must have language competency. However, English language teaching as the main lesson at primary school levels is no longer compatible with current Indonesian educational policy. Hence, English is supposed to be taught in all school level with the goal of fostering global citizens with language proficiency, since being a global citizen in the age of globalization is inevitable.

Keywords: English Language Teaching (ELT), praxes and policies, critical review



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1. INTRODUCTION

The study of foreign languages in Indonesia has a long track record. Certain schools, particularly those catering to the descendants of the nobles and Dutch children, were required to teach their students a foreign language during the time of colonial power. These schools taught languages such as Dutch, which was the language spoken by the colonizers, as well as English and German. Because of this, being able to speak a language other than one's native tongue was seen as a sign of high or respectable social status among indigenous living in the area during the time of Dutch colonial rule. This perception persists to this day. Learning a foreign language is no longer considered an elite pursuit in our day and age due to the ease with which it can be acquired by everyone; in fact, children are taught English beginning at a very young age. This might

be shown by the presence of play groups or kindergartens that have taught English to the children enrolled in such institutions.

Indonesia was once colonized by the Dutch (from the sixteenth century until 1945) and was known as the Dutch East Indies. Natives of the Dutch East Indies were already accustomed with the colonial habit of acquiring other languages while they were still under Dutch control. According to Nababan (1991), the Dutch obliged locals studying in Dutch-medium secondary schools to learn European languages such as Dutch, English, French, and German. Following Indonesia's independence in 1945, the Indonesian government abolished Dutch as a required curriculum. This decision was based on the public's widespread dislike of the Dutch.

Naturally, Dutch was connected with the language of the Dutch colonials, and the language was seen as having little international standing (Dardjowidjojo, 2000). On the other hand, English was seen as a language of worldwide importance, as represented by the United States and the United Kingdom, who were the leading global political powers at the time. Many individuals believed that English will be the future language. This created a strong justification for integrating English in the national education curriculum, paving the way for its status as “the first foreign language,” as Nababan (1991) put it. English was declared as a foreign language and was the first to be taught in schools, preceding Arabic, French, and German.

On December 12, 1967, Mr. Wachendorf, the first person to serve as Head of the Inspectorate of the Center for English Teaching at the Ministry of Education, issued the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 096/1967. According to the decree, English was the first foreign language taught in Indonesian secondary schools. According to Wachendorf, the goal of English instruction is to provide students with a “functional understanding of English.” The teaching of English is based on this Minister of Education and Culture’s Decree, which is still in effect today. The primary goal of English education in the curriculum is for students to achieve English competence through mastery of reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills. However, it is noted in the 1984 and 1994 curriculum that the priority have shifted to reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

In addition, English language seems to be an essential requirement for study at the high school and university levels, alongside other topics such as Indonesian and mathematics (Alfarisy, 2021). When children reach high school, they often have the opportunity to begin studying other foreign languages in addition to English. Some examples of these languages are German, French, Japanese, Arabic, and Mandarin. It is possible to argue that the positions of these foreign languages are complementary due to the fact that the primary language is still English, which is widely acknowledged to be an international language.

Moreover, the global community in the fourth industrial revolution is no longer geographically and temporally isolated. This is a result of tremendous advancements in the area of information technology. Mastery of other languages, particularly English, will open the way for the Indonesian people to engage as global citizens now that the global community has been united. This is one of the primary reasons why schools must teach English and other foreign languages. The government had announced a language education policy curriculum for the national education curriculum in response to globalization. Since 1945, the national education curriculum has experienced

adjustments through 2015. Foreign language policies in the Indonesian national education curriculum from 1950 to 1994, which were implemented at the junior high and senior high school levels (Djojonegoro, 1996).

During Indonesia’s reform period, which started in 1999, educational governance was decentralized. This shift in the importance of education has had an impact on both policymaking and policy execution, with an emphasis on English language teaching (Hamied & Musthafa, 2019). Indonesian government in the 1999-2004 State Policy Guidelines (GBHN) put foreign languages in a very significant position in the framework of national education and has touched different measures in connection to politics, economy, law, society, and culture (Lengkanawati, 2007). Furthermore, the policy of language education in Indonesia is governed in Minister of National Education Number 23 of 2006 (Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia, 2006) addressing Graduate Competency Standards for Primary and Secondary Education Institutions. English starts to be taught at the junior high school education level.

On the other side, the history of English language teaching (ELT) is sometimes portrayed from a methodological standpoint, implying that newer or more contemporary ways to teaching the language were or are somehow superior to what came before. A more reasonable way would be to see the evolution of English Language Teaching (ELT) as a progression from methodology to methodology, with significant overlap when comparing, in particular, the design of instructional materials (Yaman, 2019). Moreover, considering the multidisciplinary character of the ELT subject, it can be observed that numerous methods have contributed to the territory from various perspectives over the years. Similarly, some methods have made significant advancement to ELT through the techniques and methodologies they established. These articles aimed to outline Indonesian English language teaching practices and policies, as well as give critical analyses of the evolution of English language education in Indonesia.

2. METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a qualitative document analysis methodology to gather the proper data for the study. Qualitative document analysis is a research approach for critically and methodically assessing the contents of written documents (Brief, 2013). In political science research, the method is used to assist an objective and consistent study of stated policy. This method is used to collect the required data for analysis. This research examined, documented, evaluated, and presented numerous datasets acquired from a variety of published sources linked to English education policy in

Indonesia. In order to acquire more comprehensive data, the 2013 curriculum document was also evaluated to assess the English policy implementation at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Diverse forums in Indonesia have developed and periodically evaluated language policies. Foreign languages, particularly English, are acknowledged as a vital instrument for worldwide competitiveness and collaboration, research and technology, and other socialization pursuits (Hamied & Musthafa, 2019). The following section provides the state of English language teaching in Indonesia from primary school level up to tertiary level.

3.1 ELT at Primary Education in Indonesia

In primary school, students are not required to take English classes as they are in high school. The Ministry of Education and Culture issued Decree No. 060/U/1993, which designated English as the *Muatan Lokal* (Local Content Subject). This decree authorized primary schools to begin teaching English beginning with the fourth grade, provided that the following conditions were met: (1) the society in which the school is located demands it; and (2) the school possesses qualified teachers and can guarantee facilities to accommodate proper teaching-learning activities. According to Zein (2017), primary English education rose to popularity in the early 2000s as a result of a trend among parents to enroll their children in a school that provides English as a language of teaching. English teaching was made available because administrators of schools concerned that their student enrollment would suffer if they did not react to the issue. Many schools have moved the beginning of the English instruction in their curriculum forward to as early as the first grade and have done away with the instruction of native languages in favor of English.

Decree No. 22/2006 on The Structure of National Curriculum was issued by the Ministry of National Education in 2006. This decree gave schools the authority to begin teaching English earlier than the fourth grade for a maximum of two times in thirty-five minutes every class session. This scenario was different in 2013, when the Ministry of Education and Culture altered the curriculum from KTSP to Curriculum 2013. Because the curriculum placed such an emphasis on the development of positive character traits, the teaching of English in primary schools was eliminated. It was proposed that the teaching of English in primary schools should be phased out in order to make room in the curriculum for native languages, and it was emphasized that children should first acquire a level of linguistic proficiency in their mother tongue before beginning to study a foreign language (i.e.

English). This policy is still in effect under the Revised 2013 Curriculum, which was introduced in 2017. This implies that English is no longer required to be taught as part of the core curriculum at the primary level; nevertheless, many schools do continue to offer English classes as an extracurricular activity.

3.2 ELT at Secondary Education in Indonesia

Prior to 2013, the 2006 KTSP or the Competency-Based Curriculum was used as the English Curriculum that was implemented in Senior High Schools. Then, in accordance with Regulation No. 69 issued by the National Minister of Education, it was changed to either the 2013 Character-Based Curriculum or the 2013 Curriculum. Since it was originally presented, the later curriculum has been the subject of intense controversies among professionals in the field of education as well as academic scholars. In the shadow of those arguments, a number of academics conducted research into the factors that led to the introduction of the 2013 Curriculum, including whether or not the students and teachers were prepared to apply it, the challenges that were experienced in the field.

Putra (2014) suggested that there were two elements that led to the establishment of the 2013 Curriculum. The first issue was the national examination, which evaluated just listening and reading. The second factor was teachers' weak communication skills. Because of these circumstances, the teachers had little choice but to concentrate their lessons on skills that did not need the students to create the language orally. They focused most of their energy on instructing reading on a more in-depth rather than a more general level, along with grammar and vocabulary, and they paid less emphasis to teaching listening, speaking, and writing. Putra (2014) anticipated that the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum would be problematic because the decrease in teaching hours was not followed by a sufficient reduction in the number of text types introduced. He claimed that the Curriculum for 2013 should be adjusted so that it is more in line with actual classroom scenarios, and that this should be followed by an increase in the quality of the teachers.

Later on, Sundayana (2015) provides evidence for a prediction that there may be difficulties with the 2013 Curriculum when it comes to the implementation level. The researcher investigated the level of preparedness and capability possessed by the teachers to carry out the requirements of the 2013 Curriculum. Through the use of a questionnaire, he discovered that the educators who were questioned were prepared and capable of implementing the curriculum for 2013. However, the relationship between the two variables was rather weak, which indicated that their readiness

might not come from the teaching competence they had, but rather from external factors such as regulations or pressure from the working environment. As well as Gani and Mahjaty (2017) investigated the challenges associated with the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum from the perspectives of the acquisition of material, teaching and learning processes, and assessment standards. They showed that the respondents' knowledge about implementing the 2013 Curriculum was low by using a questionnaire that was administered to teachers from three different schools in Banda Aceh. The percentage of respondents who knew about the content of the curriculum was 40 percent, while the percentage who knew about the process of implementing the curriculum was 41 percent, and the percentage who knew about evaluating the curriculum was 36 percent. This lack of information, according to Gani and Mahjaty, may lead to pedagogical problems.

To sum up, the short of time allocated, the complex evaluation methods, and the lack of comprehension of the 2013 Curriculum on the part of the teachers were the primary factors that led to the shortcomings. Rukmini and Saputri (2017), who researched the application of authentic assessment to evaluate productive skills, came to the conclusion that there are problems with the assessment process as well. The researchers observed that the instructors were forced to move from teaching to evaluating because of restricted time allocation, large class sizes, and the complicated nature of genuine assessment. The researchers speculated that this may be related to the knowledge that assessment portfolios will be reviewed by school administrators at some point. Additionally, instructors would utilize the portfolios as a means of marking student work as well.

3.3 ELT at Tertiary Education in Indonesia

All students, regardless of their intended fields of study, are required to take at least two credit hours worth of English coursework as part of their tertiary education in Indonesia. According to Hamied and Lengkanawati (2018), English as a medium of instruction (EMI) study programs have been offered in Indonesian higher education since the 1920s. The first graduates of these programs were quite fluent in English throughout their time in the program. The implementation of EMI must, in its ongoing growth, take into mind the multilingual and multicultural makeup of Indonesia, both in terms of the teaching techniques and the teaching materials that are used. If an EMI program is to be implemented in a society in which oral discourses are more common than written discourses, then the teaching method should place a greater emphasis on assisting students in the development of their writing skills. The content of EMI might be adapted to better suit the community's

preexisting cultural norms in the event that such a community exists.

In a similar vein, considering that the majority of decision-makers at the national level have the desire to preserve both the national language and the indigenous languages that are already in use, the questions regarding the extent to which a foreign language is to be accommodated in the classroom should be dealt with first. According to Floris's (2014) research, both students and teachers thought it was significant that English be utilized as the language of teaching. However, she also saw that teachers experienced challenges, such as when students had trouble answering in English due to the fact that the majority of them did not have appropriate English skills.

Afterwards, it was suggested in both studies (Floris, 2014; Hamied & Lengkanawati, 2018) that there should be a policy from concerned higher education institutions to address the insufficiency of the students' capacity in their English proficiency and their mastery of the field of study, as assessed in their entry selection test to get into the program. This was done in order to address the inadequacy of the students' capacity in their English proficiency and their mastery of the field of study. If those who graduated from the program did not achieve the degree of expertise in their respective fields of study that was indicated in the aims of the program, it would be damaging to the EMI. If they did not succeed in their undergraduate program, they would be held responsible for what happened. Students' overall academic results suffer as a result of the language barrier, which has some detrimental influence.

A research was carried out by Dewi (2017) to investigate how university professors of English and other courses felt about EMI at a variety of different higher education institutions. The findings indicate that attitudes regarding EMI at the tertiary level in Indonesia are complicated, encompassing not just language concerns but also bigger issues like as national identity and feelings toward English as a medium of teaching. This was shown to be the case in Indonesia. There has been a rise in the number of EMI programs offered at the level of postsecondary education. This arises as a reaction from higher education institutions to the proposal that has been formulated by the Minister of Research and Higher Education to introduce a mandatory bilingual curriculum across all universities in Indonesia. It is thought that students' employability after graduation might be improved by attending classes taught in both English and Indonesian, which would also assist internationalize educational institutions at the tertiary level.

3.4 Future Place, Status, and Role Potentials for English Language Teaching in Indonesia

Several policies and research findings cited and discussed in earlier sections appear to lack confidence in the future of English language teaching in Indonesia. However, the researchers are optimistic about the benefits of English language teaching in Indonesia in the future. It may be difficult to see a brighter future at this point, but the “ELT-Going as one of the required courses at any educational level in Indonesia” campaign has some possibilities for growth in the future. As a means of ensuring that Indonesia’s generation is ready to confront the global marketplace, the government’s decision to mandate English as a subject at all levels of school is quite acceptable. According to Alwasilah (2001), the education system in Indonesia has to include English instruction since this language is beneficial to the growth of future generations of Indonesians. It means that by having good proficiency in a foreign language, they will be able to compete with global demands. Tsui and Tollefson (2007) pointed out that if students want to have exposure to science and technology, they must have a command of the English language. Following are some various recommendation for English language development in Indonesia.

Firstly, English language instruction must begin as early as possible in Indonesia. Even if students in kindergarten are required to have some exposure to the English language, because language acquisition is best fostered in early childhood. Secondly, over the last several years, a number of skilled ELT instructors have amassed. The authorized organization must verify their academic credentials and ELT professional training. This notion should be expertly recorded, and organized strategies should be devised to preserve the skilled professionals for future development. Thirdly, ELT as a field of study should be properly defined and further developed so that ELT teacher candidates can be chosen and trained in a complete way. Fourthly, the development of ELT and the ELT training program should be supported by research resources. Systematic research projects may be used to establish a program such that any researcher has a set of guiding principles and research methods to empirically validate for future work. Fifthly, in partnership with the government, funding for research might be restricted. Together with the authorities, win-win research and development programs may be established so that the expansion of ELT can be examined and further improved. Lastly, thousands of ELT teachers which already working around the country are educated academically with research abilities so that they may genuinely care about performing collaboration ELT research and development in their various locations with their colleagues.

In summaty, English as a foreign language in Indonesia needs to be mastered, especially for students who are still in primary and secondary

education. The abolition of English lessons at the basic education level is inappropriate because, in an increasingly globalized world, mastery of the English language is very important to be able to compete with the world community. Therefore, learning English as early as possible is important to equip elementary level students to have a basic English language proficiency to study at a higher level of education.

4. CONCLUSION

This article has highlighted the development of English-language teaching policies in Indonesia. In doing sort of way, efforts have also been made to represent the historical path of the national curriculum, notably in regard to how the government has reacted to calls for socio-cultural. Challenges are occurring inside the nation and beyond it, in order to discover what has transpired. A critical review has been undertaken of the collections of language policies in the past and the current execution of the prevalent language policies. As a result, to solve complex difficulties encountered along the journey, a collection of concepts have been offered to pursue to look for a solution, particularly in response to the challenges carried by the industrial revolution 4.0, towards constructing Society 5.0.

Based on the current reviews, there is still a lot that has to be addressed in the formulation of the 2013 curriculum, notably addressing the exclusion of English courses as local content. This deletion resulted in the uncertain position of the English language teaching at the primary school level, such that there were variances in the substance of instruction between one school and another. The difficulty that also comes from this removal is the lack of support for effective learning facilities for courses available. Teachers do not have excellent quality guidelines, resulting in a lack of effective instructional input for students. The advancement of the 2013 curriculum that considers the prerequisites of students and teachers and is in compliance with today’s accomplishments is quite essential so that the curriculum becomes consistently effective and has a beneficial affect, especially for students and a better world of education.

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