

POLICY ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION: *RETHINKING THE FIRST THING FIRST*

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Conversing policy in foreign language education today is still relevant as it brings consequence to several aspects, one of which is its impact toward learner's language proficiency. In this discussion, I will begin with the global view on how language policy comes with the discourse on critical linguistics. It is then proceed with the issues on the national framework concerning language policy in education. Some opinions from teachers of English language department in Faculty of Humanities UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang are also presented regarding the implementation of language policy in higher education. The challenges as the further impact of the language policy are presented in the final part of this discussion paper.

Global View: English as language of industrialization & globalisation

That English become the language firstly mentioned for industrialization and globalization is undoubtful. There can be little challenge to the hegemony of English in the scientific community and the language is fast becoming the lingua franca of twenty-first century technology almost without comment (Wright, 2004). English of course will always dominate despite any opposition can appear. Many people predict that there might be other language but until today we still can see that its position is still in the first rank.

Language policies in education also concern with the position of language that dominates therefore it serves the interests of dominant groups within societies. Such policies may marginalize some students while granting privilege to others (Tollefson, 2002). From the notion 'marginalization' it refers to the area of Critical Linguistics where it also implies to ideologization and politization. This explains the dynamic of language policy applied in several

countries where the dominant language represents the way the language enacted by its community.

One example of how the dynamic of language policy brings consequences toward its burden and benefit as well is the language policy in education practised in Malaysia. In this country, it has unique case where language maintenance and shift as the phenomena play out and directed by communal sensitivities. As multicultural country where the use of Malay, Chinese and Tamil also dominate beside the use of English as second language, the language policy is a very sensitive issue. Scholar has reinforced the belief that having English language competence is a strong advantage compared to the 'cultural-bond' language. Therefore the use of English as second language is maintained. While English enjoys its super-ordinate position, many people question its relevance in relation to native-language preservation which may be given more importance than an objective innovation that is hypothesized to bring about greater national benefits (Heng & Nadzimah, 2008). This becomes an interesting issue as it links to how Malaysian construct their identity.

In Malaysia, the strong reason for taking into account the bilingual policy experiment is initiated by political will, of former Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohammad. His basic reason is that Malaysia needs betterment as the rate of unemployment among graduates. It is as the result of poor proficiency in English that would be detrimental to gaining an international foothold in economic competition (Heng & Nadzimah, 2008). We can see that similar fact also occur in our country where the graduates are not ready to face the of globalization and industrialization.

The use of English at school was not standard in some Chinese and Tamil schools, but then there exists compromise among schools to accomodate the language policy in education. In three classroom periods (120 minutes) of teaching Science in English and another three in Chinese per school week. As for Mathematics, six classroom periods are taught in Chinese and four in English per school week. In addition, two extra periods were allocated for the learning of English. We can see that Malaysian teacher really want to find the best way to compromise with learner's need. Increasing time allocated for English is an appropriate move towards addressing the need to improve English proficiency of Chinese school children (Nadzimah & Heng, 2008)

Language Policy in Indonesian Education Context

After seeing what happens in Malaysia regarding the dynamic of language policy in the context of education, we should think about our national framework regarding our language policy in education. In our country, Bahasa Indonesia fulfills the four functions: cognitive, instrumental, integrative and cultural (Nababan, 1991). It becomes second language to most Indonesians. While, vernaculars are only integrative and cultural. Therefore some argue that using vernacular or local language is not academic as it does not function as complete as our second language.

English is our foreign language which is introduced at secondary level, with receptive reading given more weight than productive skills (Nababan, 1991). But then when we ask about how proficient our learners in English, we tend to rely on one aspect, namely productive skills as the receptive skill is not always 'obvious'.

The use of language as medium of instruction at schools is also interesting to discuss because its use is not necessarily static, but has been changed through time. Formerly, teachers of kindergarten introduce the use of Bahasa Indonesia as the medium of instruction while the use of vernacular is not recommended. It occurs in cities while in rural area kindergarten teachers still appreciate the use of vernacular. Teachers are encouraged to speak the same local or regional language as the school children at the first grade and able to make use of the language as medium of instruction (Maryanto, 2008). This issue becomes a recommendation today because in a more globalized world, representing identity is urgent, and the use of vernacular as medium of instruction at first grade is to strengthen this point.

Language policy and education policy is inseparable. Keeping in mind Indonesia is a multilingual country, any change of the curriculum brings issues of multilingualism, multiculturalism and literacy developments into focus. Therefore when we converse about the two, we cannot stop the discussion as it reaches to the snow ball effect concerning the literacy development which entails them. Language policies, like education policies, are a mechanism by which the government seeks to influence language behavior. What kind of identity will be represented by the language behavior of our learners? We can get the answer of this question by considering the current language policy that promotes Indonesian as the most important medium of instruction, even in the territories where the ethnic language is more appropriate (Alwasilah, 2013).

In this stage, we are facing two folds, English versus local language. It means becoming part of global community or local one. In education, it presents in the option of local content. Many elementary schools chose English as the local content subject rather than ethnic language or ethnic music and dance. It becomes the answer of the schools concerning which one that they chose either to be global or proud of the local heritage. Due to public demand and pressure from parents, elementary schools provide English without necessarily having quality human resources supply the education (Alwasilah, 2013). This explains why we cannot warrant that the earlier English is given the better the proficiency will be.

In this case, we should see the dimension of language. Languages should be used proportionally for cultural and national development, and language education should create a mechanism of empowerment. Therefore, language education should provide students with the ability to write in ethnic, national and foreign languages (Alwasilah, 2013). It means balance of language proficiency, not only favoring on certain language which we think is more important for our students.

This is where we start, to maintain the convergence of language and literacy. Pedagogical practice should respect the mother tongue that students bring to the classroom, while at the same time they are offered Indonesian or English as new linguistic resources. That the emphasis is on the mastery of first language becomes the key factor. Language pedagogies need to recognize students' language heritage and practice as cultural and psychological capital for learning a new language, which in turn functions for developing maximum literacy (Alwasilah, 2013). There are still many people who think that it takes only English that creates maximum literacy. They forget that developing maximum literacy starts with the capital namely linguistic identity.

Regarding the development of English language teaching, there are several underlying reasons that explain its slow motion. Firstly is the inconsistency of curriculum which creates teacher's confusion. It is worsen with insufficient proficiency of English teachers and low support for Teacher Profesional Development. In addition, our first language education has not built a strong foundation for developing proficiency and literacy in the foreign language (Alwasilah, 2015). Being multilingual makes students must move from first, second into third language without further chances to develop maximally each language.

Despite the issues above, I think we should do first thing first. Character building and critical thinking are first and foremost developed through the first language. EFL teachers should be reminded that success in EFL learning to a great extent depends on the success in the first language learning. Moreover, EFL teachers have an opportunity to positively influence students on the potentials and local wisdom embedded in the ethnic languages (Alwasilah, 2015).

What Teachers Say about Language Policy in Education

I asked 14 English Department teachers: nine female and five male on their view about language policy in education and its impact to English proficiency. The novice teachers with four to seven years teaching experience viewed positively the concern on language policy in education toward the dynamic of learner's English proficiency. In the context of higher education, the standardized English test i.e. TOEFL score motivates undergraduates to reach the passing grade. In addition, these teachers recommend for more allotted time for English course. They believe that the more exposure to English will result in better proficiency. If possible, English is introduced as early as possible as they support golden period hypothesis.

The second group is experienced teachers with 10 to 15 years teaching career. The teachers believe that the changes of curriculum affect low achievers. High achievers can adapt better. Therefore the dynamic of policy in education that influence the changes of curriculum is responsible to explain the difficulty that always occur. These teachers think that low experienced education practitioners are trapped with high stake test so that they cannot create conducive learning especially those in remote schools. By these facts, this group of teachers recommend integrated learning in the context of ELT in higher education so that English is not only as MKU, but to improve the quality of graduates.

The next group is advanced teachers with 17 to 23 years teaching English. These teachers believe that language policy does not significantly and directly influence proficiency. It is just a small factor, but the policy in education should be made stronger in the context of higher education of Islamic universities. PTKIN should play its authority to establish the quality of its graduates. Students of higher education are not merely language user, their engagement to English proficiency supports their literacy advancement.

Challenges of English as foreign language teaching in Indonesia

Challenge 1: Promoting English for the Diverse Cultural Communities in Indonesia

Although we know that English is an important language, but we always have a problem to promote it. As English is not spoken in the country, the social situation does not support the learning of English. As an example of the increasing use of English is the use of English in TV programs. It is true that a number of the TV programs are in English, but the subtitle makes the listener read it instead of listening to English dialogue. This shows the low awareness of learning English which in turn will result in the higher effort to develop both the learners' motivation to learn English and their English mastery through TESOL.

Even in English class, communicating in English is not promoted by the class activities. Students listen, repeat and try to memorize words but they don't get enough exposure or actual language practice. Although the education policy has supported the ELT for young learners by the decree of MONEF no. 060/U/1993 dated 25 February 1993, it does not mean that the implementation of EYL also promotes the use of English. The basic reason is due to the fact that most of EYL teachers teaching in the primary schools are not qualified because only 46% had English education background. The class activities do not facilitate real English communication as teachers mostly (82.1%) only relied on the English textbooks which quality is also questionable. The available materials used in primary schools were produced locally and have not been evaluated by the national textbook reviewers (Suyanto & Rachmajanti, 2008). These facts show that promoting English is not easy and it should be the first underlying reason in developing the quality of both EYL and ELT in general.

As explained above, promoting English through the education policy, quality of teachers, and sufficient good textbooks are not enough. Promoting English today is currently linked with the use of internet and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). The use of such information technology-based multimedia is assumed to strengthen the learners' language acquisition in line with the theory of Recursive Hierarchical Recognition in which the neural processing is involved. It allows the brain-based multimodal learning interplaying between listening, speaking, memory and the pattern-recognition logic (Charismiadji, 2009). However, the use of IT in language learning is still progressing and has not reached learners in rural areas. In this case, it is need to be noted that TESOL in Indonesia should consider the diverse communities it serves, especially those unfamiliar with IT. Another related issue in this

challenge is that TESOL researchers and professionals have not really considered how it has contributed to the rapid erosion of cultures and languages globally. It is believed that globalization and the spread of English are the two sides of the same coin, i.e. imperialism of the dominant societies and cultures particularly the Anglo-American (Khan, 2008). Yet, it does not mean that the diversity of Indonesian culture should also be influenced by such imperialism. TESOL in Indonesia should avoid the students' developing the feelings of resistance and marginalization. Therefore, the use of English materials needs to be incorporated with intercultural communication or cross cultural understanding (Mukundan, 2004). It should be put as the bridge not as divider between the cultural differences.

Challenge 2: Reforming Education Based on Problem-Solution Perspective

TESOL has not been carried out with a lot of responsibilities; for example, from the problem solution perspective. As an example is the problem of students' development in English proficiency rooted from poor vocabulary. The solution has not been covered specifically by the English curriculum. It is worsened by the fact that many teachers, knowing their students' poor vocabulary, are still not aware that they have the freedom to develop their own syllabus (Saukah, 2009).

The teachers do not know how to choose the most appropriate teaching method to solve this problem. In this case, lexically-based language teaching can be proposed to solve the problem of Indonesian students' little knowledge of English vocabulary. Lexically based teaching is ideal as it is based on neuropsychological underpinnings. Considering the lexico-grammatical units, as words learnt in chunks, it needs more conscious process of learning formulaic phrases for fluency (Kweldju, 2004; 2005). The teachers are non-native teachers who still have problems with fluency and vocabulary skill. Therefore, before developing their students' vocabulary, they need to emphasize on vocabulary by autonomous learning (Kwedju, 1999). By developing the teachers' and the students' vocabulary, better quality and outcome of TESOL practice can be obtained.

TESOL has also invaded into the realm of bilingual education. This can be called one way for educational reform which should be based on problem-solution perspective. The implementation of International Standard School (RSBI) in Indonesia is an example of how educational reform is done hastily neglecting crucial points of problem-solution perspective.

Bilingual education applied in North America is not similar to that implemented in Indonesia. The former is based on problem-solution perspective while the latter is done only to upgrade the school level. The implementation of ideal bilingual education should follow the model of immersion program in Japan so that the expected academic outcomes can be achieved (Bostwick, 2001). In this case the use of English in the bilingual classes is not only as medium of instruction but also to increase the learners' literacy level and the graduates' academic quality.

Challenge 3: Developing Research-Based ELT

TESOL in Indonesia is not sufficiently research-based. In other words, the increasing demand of ELT quality does not go hand in hand with the development of ELT research. In fact, research-based ELT has been one of the concerns of English teacher professional organization. We have the association of English language teachers TEFLIN which has been one of excellent forums to share ideas and experience in ELT some of which are enriched by empirical data on the practice of ELT. It was established in 1970 as the concern for TEFL quality in Indonesia (Sadtono, 1997). Unfortunately, the forum involves more lecturers of English department of tertiary education than English school teachers who directly involve with the problem of limited TESOL in Indonesia.

The fact that the development of ELT in Indonesian context remains unexplored is as supported by research finding. As an example, the teaching of writing has not based on a more comprehensive view of what foreign language writing should involve (Widiati & Cahyono, 2006). As a result, in the teaching process there may occur imbalance emphasis. For instance there is some overemphasis on English grammar teachings at some time and over reactive neglect at other time. Such pendulums might have been caused by the curriculum being implemented in the country or language teaching methodologies in fashion (ibid). At this point, it should be highlighted that the either the curriculum or the teaching methodologies are developed based on research findings.

Final Remark

It is undeniable that until now English teachers in Indonesia still have insurmountable constraints in the practice of ELT and language policy is only a small portion responsible for this issue. The need to promote the use of English, to reform education based on problem-solution perspective, and to develop research-based ELT are only parts of the challenges to face. In viewing the challenges, some steps need to be conducted by referring to several aspects such as the education policy, the quality of teachers, the availability of good materials, the use of ICT, and the implementation of appropriate teaching methodologies. It should be highlighted that the practices become the emphasis in ELT not only in high school but also in higher education level. Facing the challenge also means out looking the prospects seen from the increasing use of English as the medium of the world's knowledge and its role in the internationalization of education.

Makassar, November 6th, 2017. 22:00 WITA

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