

**TESOL IN INDONESIA:  
BETWEEN CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS**

by

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A Final Essay for

**Topics in English Language Teaching**

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**DOCTORATE PROGRAM OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING  
STATE UNIVERSITY OF MALANG  
2011**

## **Introduction**

TESOL (Teaching English for Speakers of Other Language) in Indonesia deals with insurmountable constraints especially due to many obstacles to overcome by classroom teachers. Many of the obstacles are beyond their capability to surmount, such as limited number of hours, class size, insufficient good supplementary materials, etc.

Within the constraints, Indonesian TESOL is also challenged by some issues regarding to the position of ELT (English Language Teaching) from cultural and social point of view as well as the future demands as discussed below.

### **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 (Charismiadiji, 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 influence 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 worsen 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.

## Prospects

English is the medium of a great deal of the world's knowledge, especially in such areas as science and technology, and access to knowledge is the business of education. A 1980 study of the use of English in scientific periodicals showed that 85 % of papers in biology and physics were being written in English at that time, whereas medical papers were some way behind (73 %), and papers in mathematics and chemistry further behind still (69% and 67% respectively). However, all these areas had shown a significant increase in their use of English during the preceding fifteen years –over 30%, in the case of chemistry, and over 40%, in the case of medicine – and the figures twenty years further on would certainly be much higher. This can be seen even in a language-sensitive subject such as linguistics, where in 1995 nearly 90% of the 1,500 papers listed in the journal *Linguistics Abstracts* were in English. In computer science, the proportion is even higher (Crystal, 2003). Therefore promoting the use of English in Indonesia relies on the success of ELT.

Another important role of English is in the development of national education in Indonesia especially in the internationalization of education. According to De Witt (2000) internationalization of education is the process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into the teaching, research, and services functions of the institution. Besides, the term internationalization often is used to replace the term globalization, while in fact they have two different meaning. Internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education (Albatch & Knight, 2007). Such internationalization of education may remain a label or slogan without the establishment of successful TESOL in Indonesia.

English language programs have become more important in today's Indonesian schooling because of the process of globalization. To respond to the challenges and reforms that globalization has brought, schools will have to continuously upgrade their English teaching practices. School-based management, as one of the reforms, does have good intentions (Yuwono, 2005). Such a management reform could lead to an educational reform which may benefit to ELT practices.

The constraint of TESOL in Indonesia should be broken down into pieces. As an example, English teachers in resource-poor schools have to maximize whatever resources and facilities available in the school, while at the same time trying to find opportunities and funding offered by the government or possibly other stakeholders. They also have to build better networking with other schools, successful alumni, religious institutions,

universities, and other non-government organizations, particularly if parents and/or communities are not reliable stakeholders (ibid). Such effort made by teachers in their professional development is currently facilitated by the teacher certification program in which they can spend more time not for raising their income anymore but for improving their teaching quality.

### **Final Remark**

It is undeniable that until now English teachers in Indonesia still have insurmountable constraints in the practice of TESOL. 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 should be relied on empirical data for instance to apply the lexically-based language teaching, to emphasize on teachers' vocabulary by autonomous learning, or to implement an ideal immersion program in bilingual education. Therefore, more opportunities should be given to English school teachers to participate actively in professional organization to share their teaching experiences, difficulties as well as research findings.

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. School-based management and the teacher certification program also parts of the effort to improve the quality of ELT practice and the way to be freed from the problems of TESOL in Indonesia.

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