

## Education Reform and Its Implication for EFL Teachers Competencies

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**Abstract:** The teaching of English as a foreign language in Indonesia (abbreviated TEFLIN hereafter) takes place within the context of the national education system, which is also influenced by what happens in other major systems of which one is the political system. It follows that whatever change happens in the political system will certainly affect the education system, and whatever happens in the education system will in turn influence TEFLIN. The shift from the centralized to decentralized system of government, as stipulated in Law No. 22 of 1999, has required fundamental changes in the education system. Through an Education Bill, passed on June 11, 2003 by the Parliament, major changes have been proposed, with the shift from a highly centralized system to decentralized open system being the most fundamental reform. School-based management requires active participation of all stakeholders in the decision-making processes. All of these changes certainly have implications for TEFLIN in general and EFL teachers' competencies in particular.

**Key words:** education reform, education system, standards, stakeholders

We have witnessed a tremendous reform in our political system, especially after the fall of the New Order Government in 1998. This has been followed by reform in all sectors of our life, part of which is the education sector in which school-based management has been implemented as part of the realization of decentralization in education. All forms of decentralization have had a legal basis since January 2001 when

Law No. 22 of 2001 was declared effective. The educational reform does in fact need a separate legal basis.

To prepare the Bill, an Educational Reform Committee (abbreviated ERF hereafter) was established by the Ministry of Education in 2001. Prof. Suyanto, Ph.D., Rector of the State University of Yogyakarta, was appointed as the chairman, and the writer as the secretary. Later, the ERF fully supported Commission VI of the Indonesian Parliament in preparing the Bill.

The Education Bill as the legal basis-to-be of education reform is now awaiting to be passed on by the Indonesian Parliament. Assuming that no significant changes will be made, the Education Bill will be the main reference of this paper when reform is discussed.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia or TEFLIN is part of the Indonesian education system in Indonesia. As a system means "a set or arrangement of things so related or connected as to form a unity or organic whole" (Webster's New Twentieth Dictionary of the English Language, unabridged, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1983), any change in the Indonesian education system will therefore influence and even require some change in TEFLIN.

This paper will first present the major reform as proposed in the Education Bill and then discuss the implications of this reform, especially for EFL teachers competencies.

## EDUCATION REFORM PROPOSED IN THE EDUCATION BILL

### Major Changes Proposed in the Bill

When examined carefully, the goal of national education stated in the 1989 Education Act has been expanded to cover some characteristics considered necessary in response to the developments occurring both in Indonesia and abroad. These characteristics (bold-face typed) are obvious in Article 4 of the Bill as quoted below.

The goal of the National Education is aimed at developing educatees' potential so that they become human beings who believe in and are pious to one and only God, possess **good character** and exalted morality, are sound in body and mind, **hard-working, autonomous, aes-**

**thetical, knowledgeable, creative, productive, competitive, expert/skilled, and democratic, possess a vision of excellence, maintain harmony with environment, and possess a sense of social responsibility and national spirit for purposes of developing the intellectual life of the nation.**

To support the achievement of such a goal, education programs should be redesigned, planned, implemented, and evaluated appropriately. The grand design, as reflected in the major changes proposed the Bill, indicates the will to establish a solid education system.

In other words, the above mentioned goal can be achieved with the support of the reform of all elements of Indonesia's education system. To ensure that national education will facilitate the achievement of the national education goal quoted above, it is considered important to formulate the principles of education, which will be used to guide in planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating as well as developing national education. The five principles proposed in the Education Bill (Article 5) are as follows:

- (1) Education is organized non-discriminatively by careful observation of democratic values, human rights, religious values, cultural values, and the nation's plurality in the pursuit of the unity of the nation.
- (2) Education is provided by families, communities, and the government as a unified systemic, open, and polyvalent system.
- (3) Education is organized as a process of enculturation and empowerment.
- (4) Education is organized by principles of modeling, motivation, and facilitation.
- (5) Education is organized by principles of autonomy, public accountability, and quality assurance.

The educational principles above have led to the proposal of other major changes. The most important major change is the proposed decentralized system of education, which is a unified open system (Article 5), expected to enable students to develop their potentials without being constrained by the rigidity of the system; instead, they can learn at their own pace while still following the right track. This system is in line with the nature of the Indonesian nation, which is pluralistic. Moreover, this de-

centralized system, part of which has been implemented through the school-based management (Article 45). Article 45 in the Bill is about education facilities, which in line with the 1999 Law No. 22 on Regional Government. In the school-based management, community (stakeholders') participation is expected to increase through the so-called "Educational Council" and "School Council" (Article 56). Stakeholders' participation is expected to help ensure that education will be relevant to the needs of communities. Joint efforts should also be made between the Government and the community (stakeholders) in providing compulsory education (Article 31). Under such a decentralized system, the curriculum is to be locally constructed following the regulations and basic framework of curriculum development (Articles 33-34).

The decentralized system makes it possible for variations or diversifications to exist. This is congruent with the plurality of Indonesian society and disparities of situations and conditions from region to region. However, it is important to develop educational standards so that however varied the educational practices are, they are all geared towards the achievement of the national goal of education (Madya, 2002). To help ensure the achievement of the educational standard throughout the country, there must be a quality control and assurance. With the quality being controlled and standards being achieved, the students can then be mobile in pursuing appropriate, quality education and desired professions. Besides, this is related to the concern for ensuring the unity of the whole nation. In relation to all of this, articles have been formulated on education standards (Article 32), evaluation (Articles 52-53), accreditation (Article 54), and certification (Article 55). It is worth noting though that efforts should be made so that evaluation will not be threatening anymore; instead, it should be empowering.

The formulation of an article in the Bill on compulsory education (Article 31) is the implementation of Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution, which says that every citizen has the right to education. The need of certain groups is also considered, especially the need of those who wish to develop distinguished religious people and the need of people with defects and special needs. These are formulated in Article 6, Verse 2 and 3 (on special education & special services) and Article 28 (religious education).

Considering that the ever-changing demand of the global era requires good basic education and life-long education, educational services should be provided for those who cannot receive education, with re-education being inclusive, through the conventional system due to time and space constraints. These people can have access to education through the distance learning system (Article 29), which can be facilitated by the use of information technology. To ensure its quality, however, the implementation of distance learning programs should follow standard procedures. Otherwise, there will be a sanction for a failure in fulfilling the quality requirements (Article 59: 6).

All reforms of education will bear fruit faster if students are ready to learn when entering primary schools. However, very little attention has so far been paid to preschool (kindergarten) education though it is stipulated in the 1989 Education Law that preschool education should be provided. This is evident in the data presented in *Indonesia: Educational Statistics in Brief 1999/2000* showing that of the 8,521,300 preschool children, only 1,612,761 children (18.83%) enjoyed preschool education. Therefore, an article on preschool education has been proposed (Article 20).

Demanding one's rights seems to be the focus of the present young generation, who are often observed to have ignored their duties. To improve this situation, a chapter meant to ensure the rights-duties balance has been proposed, i.e. Chapter IV, Articles 6-12. This chapter has stipulated the Rights and Duties of Citizens, Communities, and the Government. The rights-duties balance is also reflected in Articles 13-14, i.e. the rights and duties of educatees.

The improvement of the education quality is believed to be ensured by the quality of teachers. Up to now a lot of teachers in Indonesia can be said to be under-qualified. To help improve this situation, it has been proposed in Chapter XI (Articles 38) that all teachers at the primary and secondary schools hold at least the first degree (*Educational Sarjana/ Sarjana + Akta IV*), lecturers for the diploma 1-3 programs at least the second degree (Master), and lecturers for the Postgraduate programs the third degrees and/or professors. Other related articles are Article 35 on teachers' professional tasks/responsibilities, Article 36 on teachers' rights and duties, and Article 37 on teacher recruitment and distribution.

To ensure that education benefits educatees and does not disadvan-

tage them in any aspect, requirements for establishing an educational institution are stipulated in Article 56 and for running distance education programs in Article 29.

Experiences show that academic degrees seem to be regarded as a symbol for one's achievement in education. The excessive desire to have such degrees have encouraged quite a few community members to pursue degrees in institutionally undesirable ways. To ensure the proper reception and use of academic degrees, Article 25 stipulates that degrees can be obtained by those who have completed higher education programs.

All of the major changes mentioned above are aimed at providing quality education for all citizens. This can be achieved only if an adequate budget is provided for education. The budgeting is therefore regulated in details in Chapter XIII of the Bill, covering the Funding Responsibility, Sources, and Management (Article 40-42), and Allocation, Budgeting, and Subsidy (Article 43).

Violations of the provisions in the Law will certainly disadvantage the society in general and educatees in particular. Administrative sanctions will be given to all types of violations. Imprisonment and fine as sanctions of violations of the provisions of particular matters are formulated in Article 59.

### **Global Context**

Since the whole life in the world is in fact a system, whatever happens in the global environment will certainly influence the life in Indonesia with all its aspects. At the global level, we can witness rapid changes occurring due to the development of science and technology. This global era is indeed highly competitive and full of challenges. However, it simultaneously offers a lot of chances to strive for the best.

Today's technological society has been identified as having the following 6 characteristics (Mulkeen and Tetenbaum, 1987, as cited by Lange, 1990): (1) The twenty-first century is knowledge-based; (2) The twenty-first century witnesses an increased information flow; (3) The twenty-first century witnesses rapid change and impermanence; (4) The twenty-first century witnesses an increase in decentralization of organization, institutions, and systems; (5) The twenty-first century is people-oriented; and (6) The twenty-first century witnesses major demographic

shifts. The implications of these characteristics, according to Lange (1990), are concerned with recruitment of prospective teachers, the shift from the teacher-centred to the learner-centred approach, lifelong learning, autonomous learner, autonomous teachers, and the needs for minority students. In relation to this, the major changes mentioned above seems to have been in the right direction.

Since the globalization draws people together through information technology, individuals' and groups' existence is at stake due to various conflicts, which create various tensions. The following are the seven tensions to be overcome by all people in the 21st century: (1) the tension between the global and the local; (2) the tension between the universal and the individual; (3) the tension between the tradition and modernity, (4) the tension between long-term and short-term considerations; (5) the tension between the extraordinary expansion of knowledge and human beings' capacity to assimilate it; (6) the tension between the spiritual and the material, and (7) the tension between, on the one hand, the need for competition, and on the other, the concern for equality of opportunity. For lifelong education, which is also stressed in the education reform in Indonesia mentioned above, to be effective three forces should be reconciled: competition, which provides incentives; co-operation, which gives strength; and solidarity, which unites. In the process of decentralization in Indonesia, these tensions can in fact already be observed. Skills in resolving conflicts (see Lewellyn, M. (1997; Pruet and Cooley, 1997; Duhon-Sells, Sells, and Mouton, 1997) seem to be new skills to be developed in every Indonesian citizen.

Seeing the characteristics of and the tensions existing in the present century, it is worthwhile to consider seriously the suggestions made by Delors (1997) in his report that education in this century should have the following pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be.

### **THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE REFORMS FOR EFL TEACHER COMPETENCIES**

The education reforms proposed in the Education Bill mentioned above certainly have implications for EFL teacher competencies. Since the goal of national education should guide everyone responsible for edu-

cating Indonesian children, the goal of national education as stated in Article 4 certainly has some implications for EFL teacher competencies, which include personal competencies, professional competencies, and social competencies. Relating the EFL teacher competencies to the goal of national education, we can say that some of the characteristics of the desired Indonesians belong to the personal competencies (belief in & piety to one and only God, good character & exalted morality, sound body and mind, hard-working, autonomous, aesthetical, competitive, democratic, harmonious with environment), two to the professional competencies (creative, productive, knowledgeable, skilled/expert, a vision of excellence), and two to the social competencies (a sense of social responsibility and national spirit). Each domain of competencies will be briefly discussed below.

#### **Implications for EFL Teacher Personal Competencies**

Concerning the personal competencies required of EFL teachers, we can ask whether the existing teachers already possess the above mentioned competencies. Assuming that they have possessed the characteristics of the desired Indonesians mentioned in the 1989 Education Act, they should be facilitated in their efforts to possess the new characteristics required of them: good character, hard-working, autonomous, aesthetical, competitive, democratic. This can be done through providing in-service education and creating a working atmosphere fostering the development of these characteristics. However, if the assumption proves to be wrong, the in-service teacher education programs should be replanned, redesigned and implemented in such a way that all the new characteristics and the missing or weak old characteristics identified through a needs assessment activity would be fostered. One thing to be kept in mind in that the teacher educators should themselves reflect the desired characteristics in their own behaviours. This consistency will of course support the achievement of the objective of the EFL teacher education programs, part of which is to develop EFL teacher competencies. In addition to the personal competencies mentioned above, the existing and prospective EFL teachers should also be adaptable and reflective (See Richards (1996). This is related to the demand of the ever-changing world.

#### **Implications for EFL Professional Competencies**

Concerning the EFL professional competencies, from her literature review, Madya (1987) has identified the following competencies: (1) command of English, (2) knowledge of relevant disciplines (linguistic science, knowledge from the field of education, knowledge of the English speaking peoples' culture), (3) the ability to teach, and (4) responsibility as a professional. One article of the Education Bill is obviously related to the requirement of having a good command of English. It is mentioned in Article 30, Verse 3, that "English can be used as the second medium of instruction in secondary and tertiary education." This means that EFL teachers should use as much English as possible in their classes, because it will be ridiculous if they do not speak English in their classes while other subjects might be delivered in English. Besides, by speaking English to communicate with their students, EFL teachers help create an English learning environment, which is conducive to English learning and acquisition.

As their English will be the model for their students, they should have a really good command of English throughout their careers. Experiences show that not many teachers speak English to communicate with their students and this has caused their English proficiency to deteriorate gradually. To help improve the situation, a proficiency test should be held for the existing teachers to find out the level of their English proficiency, which might have been lowered after leaving their campuses for a long time. The results of the test can be the basis for designing the in-service training for them. The implication for the prospective teachers is that upon completing their teacher education program, they must have reached the pre-determined standard of English proficiency. It will be desirable if the proficiency test is held from time to time to enable teachers to check their proficiency level. In this case professional organizations such as TEFLIN can contribute significantly to the development of English proficiency tests for EFL teachers working in different levels and types of schools.

Knowledge from the fields of education should include basic concepts of constructivism, learned-centred approach, and cooperative learning, while maintaining concepts of other philosophies and approaches. This is due to the fact that language learning is a complex process, involving the developments of a certain personality type required of good lan-

guage learners (moderate levels of self-esteem, anxiety, risk-taking, and language ego), cognitive skills and strategies (see Gagne, 1977) (especially related to the acquisition of the language ability components (grammatical competence, textual competence, illocutionary competence, sociolinguistic competence, see Bachman, 1990 and Celce-Murcia, 1995), psychomotor skills (especially in the case of pronunciation skills), and skills in executing all the language ability components for various purposes. Referring to Brown's (2001), EFL teachers should have as much relevant and up-dated knowledge as possible so that they can apply what Brown (2001) has termed as an "informed approach".

EFL teacher competencies in this perspective can be developed through appropriately designed EFL teacher education programs, both pre-service and in-service. EFL teacher competencies with a reform perspective have certainly been formulated before, as has been cited by Madya (1987) and efforts to help in service teachers to acquire them have been made. However, as observed by Madya (2001), very little change has resulted from such efforts. This might be related to the fact that the process of educating EFL teachers has not been as conducive as desired to the development of the intended competencies. In other words, all aspects of EFL teacher education programs should also be reformed comprehensively curriculum (with all related materials), teacher educators, and approach (including methods and techniques). Concerning the teacher education approach in particular, the application of an integrated approach seems to be worth considering; the EFL student teachers should be involved in learning processes designed according to the approach to be applied by these prospective teachers in their future classes.

A major reform of EFL teacher education program is concerned with the development of teaching skills. These skills have so far been developed peripherally through 3 credits, i.e. 1 credit for Microteaching and 3 credits for Teaching Practicum, as in the case of teacher education programs in the State University of Yogyakarta. For prospective EFL teachers responsible for carrying out teaching duties under the prospective new education law, such programs will not suffice. The EFL teacher education should be redesigned to meet the standards as stipulated in Article 32 of the Education Bill, i.e. standards of content, personnel, facilities, management, financing, and evaluation.

Referring to this article, standards should be formulated for the content for teacher education, EFL teachers, facilities and resources (including teaching-learning materials, and teacher education evaluation. Based on these standards, the EFL teacher education curriculum should be further developed, EFL teacher educators should be empowered, and the facilities and equipment as well as resources necessary for the development of EFL teacher competencies should be developed and provided.

Concerning the standards of EFL teacher education programs, Madya (2002) states that the EFL teacher education programs should be directed towards helping the EFL student teachers to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills as well as attitudes. In other words, the programs should focus on (1) the development of EFL communicative competencies and skills of executing these competences, (2) the development of communicative EFL teaching competencies and skills in executing these competencies, and (3) the development of positive attitudes towards professional development. All of this requires that the existing EFL teacher education curriculum be redesigned.

To ensure the achievement of EFL teacher education programs, the student teacher characteristics and the environmental conditions of the programs should be taken into consideration in designing the programs and implementing them. This will be eased by the freedom given to each tertiary education institution to develop its own curriculum, as stipulated in Article 38, Clauses 93 and 4, as follows: "The curriculum framework for tertiary education is determined by each tertiary institutions in reference to the standards recognized by scientific and professional associations while still in the pursuit of the goals of national education."

In addition, prospective EFL teachers are expected to participate in curriculum development in their school if the proposed idea of having schools develop their own curricula and syllabi is approved. So the teacher education programs should also help develop the student teachers' group process, negotiating and decision-making, skills. All of this implies that TEFLIN will have a very important role in the establishment of EFL teaching and learning standards.

#### **Implication for Teacher Social Competencies**

No one denies that EFL teachers are members of a community. To

be strongly anchored in their social context of life, teachers should be able to take part in the social life in which they are involved. In relation to this, they should also be able to communicate effectively with their social environment. Communication skills are then required of them, too. Inclusive in the communication skills are the skills to be a good listener, to start and stop a conversation in the right time and the right way. In short, they should have a high degree of socially and humanly sensitivity (See Tudor, 1996).

### CLOSING REMARKS

Changes occurring outside the EFL education world will certainly require changes in EFL education. In the proposed open system of education in which learner-centred approach is to be applied to help develop the desired characteristics of Indonesian citizens, the existing and prospective EFL teachers are required to possess competencies relevant for their duties. Therefore, EFL teacher education, both in-service and pre-service, should be reformed and TEFLIN can make efforts to contribute to the success of the reform.

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