EDUCATION POLICY AND EFL CURRICULUM IN INDONESIA: BETWEEN THE COMMITMENT TO COMPETENCE AND THE QUEST FOR HIGHER TEST SCORES

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Abstract: Education policies and curricula provide the context and specific expectations that drive student learning and achievement towards a sustainable future. The underlying policies and practices in the EFL classrooms do not always match consistently. There is an emerging need to counterbalance the power of policymakers in ensuring that balanced, pedagogically sound education policies and EFL curriculum are produced, carried out, and monitored. As one of civil society organizations, TEFLIN is well positioned to serve that mission. TEFLIN may take the initiative to engage in the EFL curriculum review project, EFL curriculum design, and reform in EFL teacher education and certification.

Key words: language policy, English curriculum, national exam, classroom practices, teacher competenc*e*

English is taught and used as a foreign language in Indonesia. In spite of the many years of English instruction in formal schooling, the outcome has not been satisfying. Very few high school graduates are able to communicate intelligibly in English. This sense of "failure" in the teaching of English as a foreign language may not be exclusively Indonesian and is associated with prevailing constraints shared by several other countries where English is taught as a foreign language. This paper attempts to describe the gap between the commitment to competence as promised in the 2004 Curriculum and the English classroom practices and look into the possibilities of how such an organization as TEFLIN may help shape the language policy and practices. Suggestions and recommendations include a thorough and comprehensive needs analysis, a realistic alignment of curricular objectives and the students' needs, teachers quality improvement, local initiatives in materials devel-

opment, and innovative projects involving business communities and international partners.

LANGUAGE POLICY AND USE

In Indonesia, independence saw the declining use of Dutch and the ready acceptance of Indonesian as the national language of the new republic. The willing acceptance of Indonesian was itself due to the fact that it was identified with a strong nationalist movement; it was not a significant ethnic language; it already had wide roots as a lingua franca; and it emerged as a national language at a time of violent social upheaval.

There are four kinds of languages used in Indonesia. The first one is the regional languages.[1] The second one is the national language, Indonesian which was established as the unifying language in 1928, even before the Indonesian independence. Currently, Indonesian is used for communication among people from different language backgrounds and as a medium of instruction in schools and in formal occasions. The third one is variants of Indonesian (a mixture of the standard Indonesian and the regional language). Thus, most Indonesians, with the exception of some young people who live in big cities, are bilingual, speaking Indonesian as the national language during formal occasions, variants of the Indonesian language and the regional language as the mother tongue. The last category is foreign languages.

After the independence, Dutch was not chosen to be one of the foreign languages taught in schools because it was the language of the colonialist and it did not have international stature. English was chosen to be the first foreign language. High schools may also opt to teach an additional foreign language such as French, German, or Arabic. Recently, after the downfall of Soeharto regime, Chinese has gained popularity and is taught in several schools.

Despite the fact that Indonesian has succeeded in maintaining its position as the national language and the lingua franca, the maintenance of English as a foreign language has been steady as it is officially taught throughout the secondary schools (six years divided into three years of junior high school and three years of senior high school). There has also been a growing tendency in many big cities to teach English beginning from the lower grades of primary schools and even from kindergarten.

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[1] Indonesia has 669 distinct languages spread over 3000 inhabited islands.

Learning English in primary and secondary (Grades 1 through 12) schools serves two purposes. First, students need to be prepared to read English texts in their college years. Second, competence in the English language is still used as a determining factor in securing a favorable position and remuneration in the job market. Many job advertisements list a good command of English as one of the top requirements, hence the popularity of private English courses or schools. The academic year is divided into two semesters. Starting from Grade 4, English is officially taught for two to four hours a week. At the high school level (Grades 10 through 12), students are streamed into three divisions: the Natural Sciences Stream, the Social Studies Stream, and the Language Stream. For all three streams, English is compulsory and allotted at least four class hours per week. For the Language Stream, the time allotment for English is 11 hours per week. At the university level, many non-English departments require that students take one or two semesters of English for two hours per week.

Even though English is officially taught throughout secondary schools and at the university level in Indonesia, competence in this foreign language among high school and university graduates is generally low. Only students coming from the middle and upper socio-economic classes have the easy access and opportunity to enhance their English proficiency beyond that of their peer level through other means such as private courses, computer-aided language instruction, and exposure through Western-influenced TV channels, foreign movies, and networks with expatriate communities. To provide a picture of the limited access, the cost of an eight-session English course ranges from USD20 to 100 per person while the standard minimum wage is approximately USD60 to 100 per month. It is obvious that English has played a significant role in perpetuating the social stratification in Indonesia.

Outside the academic and professional worlds, English has never been widely used as the lingua franca of the majority of the population. Yet, there have been a growing number of speakers of English—ranging from near native level to broken English use—especially among the young, urban middle class segment of the population. Inspired by their idolized celebrities from MTV-like stations, which often recruit their reporters and newscasters from among graduates of Western universities, the young Indonesians speak at least chunks of English phrases and utterances as a matter of boosting their urban lifestyle. This social marker further sets a divisive line in social interaction between different segments of the community (Lie, 2002).

A SURVEY OF THE ENGLISH CURRICULA SINCE INDEPENDENCE TO TODAY

Since its independence in 1945, Indonesia has changed its English curriculum six times using three different approaches:

Starting Year	Name of Curriculum	Approach
1945	Unknown	Grammar Translation
1968	Oral Approach	Audio Lingual
1975	Oral Approach	Audio Lingual
1984	Communicative Approach	Communicative
1994	Meaning-Based Curriculum	Communicative
2004	Competency-Based Curriculum	Communicative

In the beginning, the government used the grammar-translation method left by the Dutch. Textbooks such as Abdurachman's *English Grammar*, Tobing's *Practical Exercises*, and de Maar and Pino's *English Passages for Translation* were widely used at the senior high school level (Dardjowidjojo, 2000). In general, people preferred the British English and looked down on the American variety. Political economic shift, however, has changed this attitude.

In 1953 the Ford Foundation provided a grant to reform the teaching of English and helped set up two-year English teachers' training institutes known as B1 Course to meet the growing demand for more teachers of English within a relatively short time. Acceptance into the training institutes was highly selective with only about 50 new students every year. The training institutes then launched the Oral Approach and sent their best students to study for the MA and Ph.D. degrees in the U.S.A. *English for SLTP* (written between 1958 and 1962) was the name of the three series of course books written for junior high schools while *English for SLTA* (written between 1968 and 1972) for the senior high schools (Nababan 1982; Nababan, 1988 as quoted in Dardjowidjojo, 2000). These two series of course books can be considered as the embryo for what was then known as the 1975 Curriculum. The four targeted skills were—in the order of priority--listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Dardjowidjojo, 2000). Apparently, the English curriculum at that time was heavily influenced by the audio-lingual method and behaviorism.

Then the shift of philosophical paradigm from empiricism to nativism in the late 1950s and the sociological trends in the 1960s brought about changes in the

English curriculum. As language acquisition was viewed as an individual's interaction in his/her environment, language teaching focused more on language use than language usage (Widdowson, 1978). Hyme's concept of competence replaced Chomsky's LAD theory and the Communicative Approach (CA) began to affect the English curriculum. Thus the 1975 Curriculum was changed to the 1984 Communicative Curriculum. It is interesting to note, though, that the 1984 Curriculum contained a number of ambiguities. The first ambiguity is the mismatch between the claim of the curriculum and the type of syllabi. Although the curriculum was labeled communicative, the syllabi in the guidelines were still very structural. Textbooks developed from this curriculum reflected this structural orientation. Many of the textbooks were "misguided" and treated pragmatics as a separate topic in the form of chapters rather than incorporated them in the four skills (Purwo, 1990). The argument that the curriculum relied on the teachers to deliver the communicative approach was simply an unrealistic expectation. Many teachers of English in Indonesia have not themselves mastered the language they are teaching. Research indicates that many teachers of English are poor users of the language (Ridwan, Renandya, and Lie, 1996; Hamied, 1997). Thus, it is very hard to expect them to facilitate the transfer of learning in their English classrooms. Another study (Supriadi, 2000) reveals that the majority of teachers use the textbooks heavily and thus the teaching and learning process is very much textbook-driven. As the textbooks were still structurally-oriented, the communicative approach remained a slogan.

The second ambiguity is the mismatch between the claim of the curriculum and the organization of the skills. The order of the priority for the four skills was changed to reading, listening, speaking and writing. Apparently, the curriculum developers realized that for the majority of Indonesians, English was not a language for active communication. This, of course, contradicted the claim that the 1984 Curriculum used the Communicative Approach. In terms of the classroom methodology, there was not any significant change from that used in the two previous curricula--the grammar-translation and audio-lingual approaches. Teachers taught students discreet skills of the language and geared them toward the test.

The 1984 Curriculum was revised and replaced by the 1994 Curriculum. The official term for the curriculum guideline was the Meaning-Based Curriculum. The orientation was also the communicative approach. The curriculum is not only national but also compulsory. To produce textbooks to be adopted by the schools in the country, a textbook writer and publisher have to include all materials stated in the curriculum including the themes, the grammar, the functions and the vocabu-

lary items to be learned. My research on the senior high schools textbooks resulting from the 1994 English Curriculum (Lie, 2001) put into question the claim for relevance and meaning-based approach. The study yields some points for thought regarding the multicultural perspectives in relation to the diversity of the students. A content analysis of reading passages in English textbooks was conducted to look into four representative categories (gender, socioeconomic classes, local cultures/ethnicity, and geography). The inclusion of inter-cultural understanding in the English textbooks still leaves some room for improvement across all four categories. The findings indicate that the textbooks do not provide equal inclusion, in terms of gender representation and bias, socioeconomic classes, ethnicity, and geography. Using this kind of textbooks, students would find it very hard to find their learning process relevant and meaningful.

The 2004 Curriculum states the objectives of English instruction in junior and senior high schools are as follows (translated from Indonesian in Depdiknas, 2004):

- Developing communicative competence in spoken and written English which comprises listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
- Raising awareness regarding the nature and importance of English as a foreign language and as a major means for learning.
- Developing understanding of the interrelation of language and culture as well as cross-cultural understanding.

In the pursuit of communicative competence and intercultural understanding as stated in the 2004 Curriculum objectives, practices in the English classes do not seem to differ significantly from those in the previous periods. Cahyono and Widiati (2006) point out the extensive number of issues covered in research studies on EFL reading conducted by Indonesian researchers and academicians as compared to EFL practices which are "still lacking of insights from the theoretical developments of ESL/EFL pedagogy and research."

BETWEEN LANGUAGE POLICY AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Throughout all five curricula, ELT in Indonesia has faced four main constraints. First, the number of students is so large and their diversity—in terms of their motivation level, intellectual capability, cultural backgrounds, and access to education resources—is so high that it's hard to design a curriculum that would work effectively for the whole country. A one-size-fits-all curriculum would sim-

ply not work for the Indonesian setting. For the 2004-2005 academic year, there were 7,553,086 and 3,402,615 students at the junior high school and senior high school levels respectively (Ditjen PMPTK, 2006). Since English is compulsory at the junior high and senior high school levels, there are almost 11,000,000 young people studying English annually through formal education. The student population is so diverse that any centralized curriculum would not be able to meet the needs. To present a picture of the diversity in terms of their access to education resources, we only need to compare students in Java, especially in the big cities like Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung with those in such remote islands as Papua. A few privileged students in Jakarta, Surabaya and other big cities have regularly spent their school holiday in English-speaking countries through home-stay programs organized either by their schools or by independent agencies while their counterparts in Papua may not have access to the recommended textbooks. Those few privileged students have every mean to enhance their English proficiency to reach the near native-speaker level while some schools in remote areas have to wait for the village chief to teach English in his spare time as he is the only one who can "speak" English adequately in the village.

The second constraint is the budget shortage. Several implications of this budget shortage include the large class size, the low teacher salary, and the lack of educational resources. No matter how good the curriculum guideline is, even an excellent teacher would find it extremely hard to deliver the syllabus effectively in a class of 40 to 50 students. English classes are seldom treated differently from other subjects. In most schools, the number of students in a class is between 40 and 50. This situation is worsened by the low salary. The majority of teachers have to do some moonlighting work after school and thus are not able to put enough energy and time into making class preparation, improving their quality, and enhancing their professional development.

My participation in the national symposium for junior high school teachers of English has confirmed the finding of an earlier study (Ridwan, Renandya, and Lie, 1996) that the teachers themselves are not active users of English. The symposium—held in Yogyakarta on November 18-22, 2002--was part of a World Bank project to improve the quality of teachers in six areas of study (English, Indonesian, geography, math, physics, and biology). Teachers from different provinces were given the opportunity and supervision to conduct classroom action research and write a paper. Best papers for each area were selected first at the provincial level and then sent for competition at the national level. About eighty junior high school teachers of English presented their papers at the national symposium.

Along with four colleagues from TEFLIN (organization for the Teachers of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia), my role was to read the papers, listen to the presentations, give feedback to the teacher-researchers, and select the best five. Teachers of English had a choice to write the paper and deliver the presentation in English or in Indonesian. To my amazement, out of forty-five papers presented at the national symposium[2], none was written in English and fewer than ten teachers delivered their presentations in English. During the discussion sessions, teachers did not feel comfortable talking in English, either. Although this project managed to spark some intellectual enthusiasm among the teacher participants through their classroom research, the fact that the teachers were not at ease using the target language required either a more realistic alignment between curricular goals and availability of resources or much more investment in teacher quality improvement.

The limited budget also led to the lack of educational resources. Only exceptional schools have language laboratories, adequate libraries or self-access learning centers. Most schools don't even provide a tape recorder and cassette tape to let students listen to model input.

The third constraint is the nature of EFL learning environment. In Kachru's (1992) category, being in the Expanding Circle, Indonesia does not provide adequate exposure to English for the majority of the learners. This perhaps used to be a universal constraint among other countries where English is used as a foreign language. People did not have ready access to read and listen to English materials. Besides, at the immediate level, there are no urgent real needs for the majority of Indonesians-- as well as no adequate resources-- to develop communicative competence in English. With the vast growth of information technology and the uneven distribution of wealth, however, Kachru's categorization needs to be revisited. A country like Indonesia may be categorized as the Expanding Circle and the Outer Circle at the same time. The majority of students are learners of English in the Expanding Circle while the urban new rich and their offsprings have made themselves comfortable users of English and of all attributes pertaining to the language.[3] Thus, there have been unequal opportunities in the learning environment for learners of English in Indonesia.

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[2] Altogether 400 papers were submitted and the forty-five papers written by the teachers of English were supposed to be the best from the provinces.

[3] Several international and national plus schools have emerged in such big cities as Jakarta, Bogor, Surabaya, Denpasar, and Malang. The national plus schools have begun

The last constraint is the politics of policy and curriculum. Partly to respond to the growing and urgent call for decentralization and more regional autonomy, the competency-based curriculum (CBC) was written and launched. After the try-out stage and the revisions, the curriculum is now being implemented, supposedly along with the school-level curriculum (*Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan* or *KTSP*). This CBC sets basic competencies that need to be mastered by students. The guideline only sets minimal standards to be achieved. What to teach and how to achieve those standards are up to the schools and teachers. English is one of the three subjects in the final national examination for the junior high school and senior high school levels.

Along the same line, the Ministry of National Education has also developed and tried out the guideline of school-based management or SBM (*Manajemen Peningkatan Mutu Berbasis Sekolah* or *MPMBS*). In school-based management, schools have the authority and autonomy to make operational policies most appropriate for their own contexts. Thus, in implementing the competency-based curriculum, schools may decide on what competencies to include in addition to the set competencies from the Ministry of National Education and to choose the learning materials deemed appropriate to develop those competencies. By the same token, schools can also develop their own teaching-learning materials, methods, media, and assessment. Therefore, there will be the national curriculum and the school curriculum.

In spite of all the ideals of the 2004 Curriculum, there has been a mismatch between the commitment to competence and the insistence of the Ministry of Education to sustain the national examination for junior and senior high school levels. The average passing grade for math, English, and Indonesian for 2006/2007 is 4.25. Although teachers are supposed to have the autonomy to develop and carry out the curriculum based on the basic competencies and minimal standards as set in the 2004 Curriculum, school practices in regard to EFL teaching do not reflect the ideals of the curriculum. The national exam frenzy drives teachers to teach to the test and drill their students for several months of their last year in high school. In spite of this frenzy, many schools in some regions are considered to perform poorly in the national examination. The previous constraints (size and diversity of students, budget shortage, and expanding circle environment) have most probably

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to adopt international curriculum and benchmark with partner institutions overseas. Between 20 to 50% of their teachers are English-speaking expatriates.

caused some regions to suffer from the national competition that is not set on an equal footing.

The implementation of CBC and SBM will bring about several possibilities. Like two-edged swords, these possibilities may be opportunities as well as threats. Both CBC and SBM were launched as a response to the heated dissatisfaction against strict centralization in many areas of life. In the education sector, there has been heated criticism against the one-size-fits-all type of curricula. The criticism was targeted particularly at the previous regime's design to retain control of the people's mindset through the education system and at the failure of the previous curricula to meet the diverse needs of the Indonesian population. The education sector was even blamed for separatist movements in several areas of the country. Along with the regional autonomy policies in other sectors, CBC and SBM were apparently meant to make up for the past flaws and to share the power with the schools to make policies. In this sense, the 2004 Competency-Based Curriculum will lead to opportunities for regions and schools to meet their needs better and to make learning more relevant and authentic for the students.

Regarding TEFL in the context of CBC and SBM, autonomy would enable schools to add, modify, and leave out competencies to suit their own context. Several so-called national-plus schools are using different international curricula (O Level or the International Baccalaureate program). Students in this school receive English immersion program as approximately 80% of the students are set to continue their study abroad. Another example is that schools in areas with a strong tourist industry such as Bali and Yogyakarta may want to develop more advanced oral competencies than those set in the national curriculum. On the other hand, some schools in the jungles of Kalimantan and Papua where the students have no perceived immediate needs for English and where no teacher of English could be found may opt to leave out some competencies pertaining to the use of English for international communication. Such schools may better use the time allotment for more relevant competencies such as rain forest preservation knowledge and skills. In between those two extreme cases, many other schools may choose to include translation, notetaking, summarizing, scanning, skimming, and comprehension competencies to prepare their students to read English textbooks in Indonesian universities. The autonomy tied to the concept of CBC will provide opportunities for schools to provide more relevant and meaningful learning for the students.

The threat, however, lies in the unclear perception of the school's needs, wants, and capabilities. It is true that each school needs to conduct a thorough need analysis before adopting the most appropriate curriculum. Unfortunately,

needs are often confused with wants as revealed in the survey of eight provinces by Huda (1999). This survey was conducted under the advice of the Minister of Education and Culture with the main purpose of collecting data and information about the teaching of English in secondary schools from which new policies will be set up. In particular, the survey was designed to examine the perception of students, teachers, and parents about the advantages, objectives, and methods of teaching English in secondary schools. Schools may not be aware of the extent of its own capabilities in relation to its needs and wants and parents set up unrealistic expectations pertaining to the teaching of English in schools. English is considered as a prestigious subject and thus schools make it a compulsory one with high competencies although the schools may not have adequate resources to support its wish.

Another threat is the possibility of inequity and disparity among schools. Several schools with obvious needs and valid resources to develop and achieve advanced competencies in the English instruction may excel and prepare their students better for the global competition. In the meantime, the remote schools, in spite of their well-intended policies to replace the English communicative competencies with more relevant ones, may eventually marginalize their students even farther in the fierce competition to win the world's resources—a competition which involves the use of English as the language of power. Curriculum developers do not have the right to stream the students based on their access to resources and short circuit their future at such an early stage. This dilemma definitely contains ethical perspectives that need further exploration among not only scholars and practitioners of ELT but also parents, student representatives, sociologists, anthropologists, economists, and political scientists.

LOOKING FORWARD

Many factors contribute a great deal to the success or failure of the teaching of English in Indonesia. Education is too important to be left to the policymakers in determining its success (and failure). There is an even emerging need to counterbalance the power of policymakers in ensuring that up-to-date, balanced, pedagogically sound education policies and EFL curriculum are produced, carried out, and monitored. As one of civil society organizations, TEFLIN is well positioned to serve that mission. With TEFLIN's knowledge base of ELT concepts, principles, and practices and the network of ELT researchers and educators, it can help influence curriculum development and policies as well as teacher education and resources. Over the years, this organization has managed to establish a network of

academicians and researchers, and ELT practitioners. The theories and research studies that have circulated within this network would be a waste unless they are used to affect ELT policies and practices so as to benefit the students. Specifically, TEFLIN may take the initiative to engage in the EFL needs analysis, curriculum review project, reform in EFL teacher education and certification, curriculum design and development projects.

The ongoing spread of English in various parts of the world proceeds within a global context of power that pervades the latter part of the twentieth century and is likely to continue in this century and the following. As Fishman (1983) indicates, "not only is English still spreading, but it is even being spread by non-English mother tongue interests." Thus, if the continued spread and growth of English is one inevitable aspect of the current international sociolinguistic balance of power, as a relatively young and developing country, Indonesia does not have much choice other than teach the language to its young people to be able to compete globally. The continued spread of English across cultures may be viewed as a chance to extend oneself and one's roles beyond the confines of one's culture and language. Yet, Indonesia is so diverse that the practices of one-size-fits-all curricula of the past are not valid anymore. To what extent English should be taught in formal schooling will vary from one local context to another. A thorough and comprehensive needs analysis should be conducted in each area before designing their English curriculum and setting the competencies. Findings of this need analysis should enable schools to make a more realistic alignment of curricular objectives and the students' needs.

Should schools decide to set advanced competencies in their English curriculum, the very first step to take is to improve the quality of their English teachers. Their level of English proficiency definitely has to be improved. Furthermore, teachers should enhance their knowledge base and mastery of various teaching methodologies. Further study plans and in-service professional development programs need to be carried out in the near future. These plans and programs can be tied in to the teacher certification program that is required in the Bill of Teachers and Lecturers (UU Guru dan Dosen). Many institutions may now be competing to gain the authority to carry out the certification. As an association of teachers of EFL, TEFLIN is very well-positioned to be in charge of the certification program for teachers of English.

Now that the competency-based curriculum has been implemented, local regions and educators should be prepared to set their competencies and to develop their own learning materials. This new curriculum is a much awaited response to

the pressing call for decentralization and regional autonomy. However, concerns that the local regions are not ready should not be neglected. Many regions still lack resources and power. In cases where the local educators and scholars may not be ready to develop their own materials, TEFLIN can facilitate the curriculum development projects and link the English curriculum developers and textbook writers at the national level to their local counterparts as partners.

All the above recommendations can be too costly for most schools although they are very important to make TEFL in Indonesia work. Several schools may be creative enough to find ways and carry out innovative projects. Some innovation that schools can attempt to do is to establish cooperation with business communities and international partners and develop mutually beneficial programs. For instance, schools may seek for scholarship for their teachers' further study and assistance in materials development from their international partners in return for the huge captive market in Indonesia. It's time that the scholarship and fellowship be directed also to secondary school teachers rather than to university teachers only. There are approximately 11,000,000 young people studying English annually at the secondary school level. This figure is about four times higher than the whole population of Singapore and reflects a huge potential market for the teaching of English.

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