

ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN INDONESIAN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION: Theory and reality

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Manuscript received February 26, 2019, revised June 17, 2019, first published June 19, 2019, and available online June 19, 2019. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22373/ej.v6i2.4506>

ABSTRACT

The globalization phenomenon marked by the flow of people movements, the advancement of informational technology, and the shrinking price of transportation has brought people around the world into one global community. Comprised by people from diverse linguistic backgrounds, this community sees the need to use a common language to bridge the communication gap. With a long-established economic and political power, English comes to the forefront as a global lingua franca. With its growing and pervasive influence, the need to learn English has never become more apparent. This need is often translated by government into language-in-education policy. This paper, to start with, will observe how language policy and globalization build a causal relationship. In the section that follows, language-in-education policy in Indonesian context will be presented. The following part will move on to discuss the use of EMI in *Sekolah Berstandar Internasional* (SBI)-International Standard School in Indonesia. In the end, a reflection and conclusion of EMI in Indonesia context will be discussed. In doing so, this paper employs literature study approach to explore the EMI practice in Indonesian schools. All relevant information was collected from several sources such as books and journal articles. The information was then utilised to build on discussions on existing theoretical framings, language policy and globalization, and on language-in-education policy and practice in Indonesia.

Keywords: *English as medium of instruction; Sekolah Berstandar Internasional; Language policy; language-in-education policy; globalization*

INTRODUCTION

Language policy is most conceptually defined as any organized interposition of language's use conceptualized by an authority of a community and defended by law (Spolsky, 2004). Language policy plays an inherent role in political activities of a nation by reflecting the sovereignty of government (Wright, 2004) while at the same time also mirroring ideologies about language hold by the policy maker (Ricento, 2006). This concept offers an explicit reference that language policy plays such a powerful force in a socio-political context that can manipulate a specific group of people to do particular actions. Due to its support usually coming from the highest authority, language policy is oftentimes used by a government as a tool to exert ideological beliefs to broader societal contexts. And more often and not, it is pedagogical settings through language-in-education policy that become common breeding grounds in which those ideological motivations are translated and put into practice.

Language-in-education policy is commonly described as a set of education system principles that works as a basic framework in choosing a language approach used in classrooms. In its practice, this policy acts a rule of thumb in settling on what language to teach in the classroom, how teaching and learning of the chosen language take place and which assessment methods employed to gauge learners' language attainments. In the domain of English as a foreign language (EFL) learning, one of the examples of language-in-education policy products is English as a medium of instruction (EMI). As put forward by Dearden (2014), EMI is "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English" (p.4). Dearden further argued that the employment of EMI in the sphere of education in EFL countries has faced a growing trend in last recent years, with more education systems in these countries witnessed to lean strong support towards the implementation of EMI in their institutions.

The fact that English that gains more important status and pervasive power in the current global situation, where almost all people are now expected to have "the ability to express [themselves] clearly and appropriately" (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012, p.125) by using the language and the fact that the number of people speaking

English as L2 (second/foreign language) has exceeded the number of native speakers in the inner circle countries (e.g., the UK and USA) put together (Llurda, 2004; Kachru, 2005) has made EMI become one of the most-administered approaches in EFL countries. Besides that, the fast development of technology and digital communication as an out-turn of globalization also become aspects that can be taken into account of why EMI is now becoming such a global trend in English education arenas. With a somewhat effortless access to internet, English interactions involving anyone from all over the world can now take place in a matter of seconds. And what it means with English education is that the demand of a teaching approach that is capable to make English learners communicate effectively has never been higher. Then, it could be taken as read that language policy and the emerge of EMI have always been intimately connected to the globalization phenomena.

GLOBALIZATION AND LANGUAGE POLICY: HOW THEY ARE INTERCONNECTED

The notion of globalization, most commonly thought as transactional situation allowing people coming from different background varieties to exchange interests within economic, political, and bureaucratic interaction (Collins, Slembrouck, & Baynham, 2009), has started to roar since the last few decades. The salient privilege of enjoying the interdependences across regions and continents, also an open chance of exercising authority (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999) has led more and more countries to take part in the celebration of what Kenichi Ohmae (as cited in Guillén, 2001) conceptualized as Borderless World. Then, how is language policy related to this concept? Tollefson (2013) states in his work that “the process of globalization, therefore, has direct and immediate consequences for language policies in education” (p.19). However, one can argue that it is political and economic interests as well as advancement of telecommunications that bring people from different cultural backgrounds together to engage in a communication (Singh, Zhang, & Besmel, 2012) that initiate language policies in many countries. The significant advancement of transportation and technology has helped create the concept of borderless interaction to step on another level of reality into what McLuhan (1994) proposed as global village-a

community consisting of different people connected by telecommunications- and the age of information- the change of medium of communication (e.g., from radio to telephone). These ideas later underpinned the concept of culture-ideology of consumerism by Glasgow-born sociologist Leslie Sklair (as cited in Guillén, 2001). Sklair argued that the notion of culture-ideology of consumerism, mainly related to the symbols of lifestyle and self-image, has brought far-reaching consequences such as standardization of desire and taste. Besides that, culture also plays a vital role in changing people's mind as well as their lifestyle through its hegemony. Culture, through its potentially strong value and power, could invade another weaker culture that will later result in the absorption of strong culture values (Xue & Zuo, 2013).

As for English language, the development of the language in postcolonial countries and the fact that English is the language of the United States, the centre of economy, politics, military power and mainstream culture (Phillipson, 1992) give rather an adequate explanation on how English, then, becomes the most-desired language many people wished to master. The prevalent influence of English in the global contexts had affected how most people perceive the language by getting them to believe that English plays such a vital role in their lives by acting as “a gateway to education, employment, and economic and social practices.” (Guo & Beckett, 2007, p.119). By mastering the language, it is believed that one can get a better opportunity and access to education and employment while at the same time raise their competitiveness in the global markets. This, as a consequence, leads many governments in EFL countries to acknowledge the needs to equip their people with the knowledge and ability of the language.

Many scholars and professional in EFL areas have since then been busy creating and finding ‘the best and suitable’ teaching approach to implement in the language classrooms (Bowers, 1995). These occurrences, according to Sklair’s work (1994), can be assumed a proof that English has become “the institutionalization of consumerism through the commodification of culture” and that its mastery will give “the promise that a more direct integration of local with global capitalism will lead to a better life for everyone” (p.178). This also at the same time becomes a clear evidence that English has successfully achieved its hegemonic status that drives many

governments into setting up language-in-education policy to the forefront of the national agendas to facilitate the countries' demands of the language.

LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION POLICY IN INDONESIA

English and Indonesia share no common history in the way that English does with some other countries like Malaysia and Singapore. As the postcolonial nations, Malaysia and Singapore have a long history with British Empire and its language. English in these countries has been long disseminated and built a strong causal relationship in the wide range of governmental, societal, and educational sectors (Higgins, 2003). Meanwhile as the former Dutch empire colony, Indonesia shares a somewhat much less amount of historical relationship with both Great Britain and English language in the past. Thus, not much has happened between the nation and the language since the first introduction of the language until its status in the present-time Indonesia. English has been maintaining its influence in the country in these recent decades thanks to the globalization process.

However, unlike the reaction in some developed Asian nations that initially showed a defensive attitude toward English language, Japan for example, which discouraged the use and teaching of English in the national curriculum mainly due to a heightened diplomatic relationship with the USA (Seargeant, 2011) and the emerge of Nihonjinron-Japanese nationalism movement (Sullivan & Schatz, 2009), English has received a reasonably enthusiastic welcome in Indonesia. This phenomenon is arguably caused by the fact that Indonesia perceives the language as a language of intelligence and high social status (Tanner, 1967). The importance of learning this global lingua franca has also been narrated on language-in-education policies issued by the country.

Language policies in Indonesia have changed over time. In the 1950s, few years after Dutch set their feet off Indonesia, the country's government appeared to acknowledge the need to build international relationships with other countries especially the United States, which has since then put substantial political, economic and financial influence, through USAID for example (Lowenberg, 1994). This situation, at the same time, brought English into play on Indonesia education system. The importance of English emerged as it started to be recognized as a medium of

international communication. English has, then, become one of the compulsory subjects to teach at Indonesian schools. However, as stated by Lauder (2008) the inclination of teaching English at that time did not focus on furnishing students with the communicative competence-the ability of a language learner to engage in a conversation effectively and meaningfully in a society where the language they learn is primarily spoken (Hymes, 1977). According to the national language policy, the goal of teaching English was to make the neoteric advancement of science and technology, frequently written in English, more accessible for students (Lowenberg, 1994). The goal set by Indonesian government at that time might resonate the idea of Greenwood (as cited in Phillipson, 2009) that speculates "science cannot be advanced without the English language and textbooks and students will make better progress in the science by taking the English textbooks and learning the English" (p.65).

Nevertheless, as the globalization idea started to span around the world, its effects have driven Indonesia to gain more intensive relations with other countries. The country's decision to take part on the declaration of Millennium Development Goal, establish a working relationship with The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and initiate the formation of The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that will later prompt the emerge of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) become an apparent example of the case. These national commitments make interactions and business environments more international. The communication among people coming from different culture becomes unavoidable. In this situation, different people will bring a different set of belief when they are interacting and often without a careful observation, a clash in a communication flow happens. As a consequence, the need of having an intercultural interaction competence becomes more apparent. Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) assert that such expertise is important "not only to communicate (verbally and non-verbally) and behave effectively and appropriately with people from other cultural groups but also to handle the psychological demands and dynamic outcomes that result from such interchanges" (p.51). These events have led to the inevitable change in the focus of the national language-in-education policy. Given the shift phenomenon in language policies in Indonesia, one can assume what

Spolsky (2004) speculates on the nature of language policy is correct. Language policy is about choice, he states, be it the choice of a specific sound, dialect, variety, or skill of the language. It might be implicit or explicit, based on the ideology of an individual, group of individuals, or authority body.

EMI IN INDONESIA: THEORY, REALITY, AND REVISION

As one of the most-implemented products of a language policy, EMI has gained its popularity in the last few decades. EMI has been observed in many educational institutions including, but not limited to, higher education level. Depending on a specific circumstance, the use of EMI is possible to be extended on a primary and secondary level (British Council, 2004).

EMI in Indonesia does not enjoy the same euphoria as it does in other Asian countries (e.g., Singapore, Malaysia, China, or South Korea) where the implementation of this recent language teaching approach trend gains unprecedented popularities especially in the higher education level. However, an effort had been made by Indonesia authority through a new education program called Sekolah Berstandar Internasional (International Standard School) to put EMI theory into practice in its primary and secondary education in the hope that students would benefit the most from the process.

The final goals of Sekolah Berstandar Internasional (SBI) implementation as mention in the Ministry of Education's (2009) document are aimed at endorsing English language use in the classroom that would in the end: attain national education excellence with the same quality as those in OECD country members, enable students to acquire global competencies, produce qualified vocational school leavers that are ready to compete in the global market, and enhance students' ability to communicate in English proved by high school students' achievement on TOEFL score that is higher than 7.5 or TOEIC score that is higher than 450 for vocational school students.

Whereas some of the stated goals seem good and attainable, others appear hard if not impossible to achieve, given the educational situation and economic

status of the country at the time the policy was implemented. One of those seemingly unachievable goals is where the government tries to reap the same academic excellence as those of OECD countries' such as Finlandia by adopting some aspect of the countries' curriculum. Albeit not explicitly stated in the policy document what values of those curriculums Indonesian government intended to emulate, one can argue that it is English as the language of instruction, as Ministry of Education (2009) commands on article five and six that teaching activities in SBI are conducted through English and that teachers should be able to use the language in the classroom. Although English is not a mandatory language of instruction for all subjects in SBI where subjects such as civic, religion, Bahasa Indonesia, and history must be delivered using the national language, a definitive insight can be gained that the popularity of EMI that many regards as the most recent solution in English learning has convinced the authority of educational sector in Indonesia to administer the approach in schools. The fact that the country was still struggling with the issues around universal enrolment on primary education level, the equitable distribution of facilities in school, and the small number of qualified teachers (The World Bank, 2007) did not hinder the government to bring their somewhat premature ambition into existence. This fact provides the feasibility of this global phenomenon in Indonesia context enough rooms for a critique.

As one might be able to predict, the unprepared implementation of EMI in Indonesia has brought no fulfilling results. Since its first application in 2006, SBI in Indonesia has not escaped criticism. Hendarman (2011) argues that in a broader social context, many critiques have been focused on the issue of inequality, school tuition, and the program funding. The problem of inequality in education system highlights the protests of parents from lower economic status claiming the regular schools where they sent their children to have worse education quality. Better facilities that the government provides to SBI has created an issue among parents that there is disproportion contribution of instrumental supports among schools. The skyrocketing school tuition becomes the next problem. The increasing price in SBI schools despite the funding they received from regional government budget has created a significant gap in society. While equality becomes one of Indonesia education principals, this phenomenon has lead to a situation where children from

wealthy families crowd in on SBI school. The non-less prominent issue is the obscurity of the SBI funding. As Indonesia government has provided a regional autonomy since 1999, each province in Indonesia should regulate the funding of SBI in their area. Many critics have been addressed since many local authorities failed to provide a clear statement about the school funding to the public.

On a pedagogical context, critiques can be addressed to the issues of students' English competency, teachers' qualification, and language ideology. The use of English as a medium of instruction assumes that students have adequate skills to demonstrate their understanding of written and spoken English. The fact that English is treated as a foreign language in Indonesia would automatically mean that students do not speak the language as their first language nor do they have enough spaces to bring it into practice. The low ability of most, if not all, students to tackle with English will hinder them not only in the teaching-learning process but also in the general interactions in the class. This phenomenon is also encountered not only in Indonesian context, in many English as a foreign language (EFL) countries like Korea or even in a country where English is treated as a second language like Ghana and Uganda, some research have reported that the use of EMI has resulted on a lower understanding of students toward subject being taught. In Korea, some students argue that the use of Korean language to teach subjects' concept will give them a deeper understanding (Byun et al., 2011; Kyeyune, 2003). While in Uganda, the study reports that students are still struggling in the classroom as they often encounter unfamiliar terms that impede their understanding (Owu-Ewie & Eshun, 2015).

A revision that can be offered toward this issue is that an investigation of a context where a language-in-education policy is going to be implemented should be done exhaustively and thoroughly. It is essential to bear in mind that there is an interconnectedness between a language teaching process and the pedagogical context. One cannot focus on one aspect while ignoring the other. Often than not in language policy-making process, the authority will adopt a policy's product for the reason that it gains a successful story in other countries without having a thoughtful examination on the product suitability to theirs. The Indonesian government should have put the general ability of Indonesian students in English into consideration

before bringing this fancy approach into practice. They also should have been more aware that students' language will play a crucial role in this program, just like what Tiffen (1967) states a long time ago, "students should have thorough command of the English language if he is to be educated in the modern sense of the word" (p.7). The mastery of an instruction language is the basic requirement for students before they learn other subjects in the classroom. Besides that, the use of English as the language in the classroom appears to function as an exposure for students with the target language so they can acquire the language without consciously learning it. This principle reflects the idea of a model of second language learning proposed by Bialystok (1978). It argues that an immersion class-the class providing an intensive exposure of a target language to students such as those in SBI-will enrich students' implicit linguistic knowledge (any knowledge stored in a person's brain that can be called anytime subconsciously in a target language interaction). But it is important for us to now that it is impossible for any part of a language becomes implicit knowledge without having passed the process of explicit language knowledge (knowledge of a language that is acquired consciously). It is highly doubtful for students, particularly those living in a country like Indonesia where there are very few exposures of English outside the classroom, to know that a sentence is written in passive without having learned the rule initially. Therefore, exposing students with explicit linguistic knowledge before and along the process of SBI program implementation should have been placed at the centre of government's attention.

The next issue revolves around the teachers' capability to use the approach. It has been a huge issue around the implementation of the language policy's product that a lot of teachers are not qualified enough to ensure teaching-learning activities through English medium takes place effectively in the classroom. British Council's (2004) research project reports that as many as 46 out of 55 countries joining the study, Indonesia is one of the participants, responded that they do not have qualified teachers to teach using EMI. Although the report does not explicitly state the list of the country from which the response came, we can assume from the study done by Ma'arif (2011) that many teachers in Indonesia at the primary and secondary level still lack English skills. Ma'arif states that in some cases the English skill of the students is higher than those of the subject teachers. Although the ministry of

education decree mandates the teachers use English along the teaching-learning process, the majority only use English at the beginning of the class. Whenever the things become more complex, a shift of English to students' native language (L1) in these circumstances seems unavoidable. Not only in Indonesia, in another context where English becomes a foreign language for the majority of the people like in China, a research like that of He & Chiang (2016) also found that the inability of subject teachers to communicate in English has made the teachers frequently switch to the student first language. It apparently contributed to students' confusion, frustration, and inability to absorb the materials and engage in a meaningful communication.

What these appearances inform is that another common problem may arise from the implementation of language-in-education policy is "a difference between the policy as stated (the official, *de jure* or overt policy) and the policy as it actually works at the practical level (the covert, *de facto* or grass-roots policy)" (Schiffman, 1996, p.2). It is worth remembering that the problem is possible to be minimized by better preparing teachers. As EMI is not primarily designed to teach English subject, the government should be mindful of the teachers of other subjects' ability in the language they do not speak. The fact that there are no higher education institutions in Indonesia that offer programs to prepare teachers to teach subjects using international curriculum or through English should have become an alert for them before setting the program out to the public. Although hiring expatriate teachers sounds to be practical, it can also be tricky and difficult at times. Foreign teachers at public school might benefit the students with more exposure to an authentic communication, but at the same time, they can also pose challenges. Their lack of an understanding of local educational system and values increase the chance of an unsuccessful communication in the class (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). Moreover, we should not ignore the fact that there is inequality issue on public school teachers' pay in Indonesia and employing teacher from other countries will only biggen the existing gap. Therefore, in-service teacher training seems to be the only practical solution in Indonesia context. It is essential for teachers to be familiar with the curriculum use in SBI as it poses different activities, material, or testing system. Not

only on the curriculum familiarity, communication skills should also be focused on in-service teacher training.

Conflicting ideologies is another potential concern. In 1994, Agar (as cited in Brown & Lee, 2015) states in his work that “culture is in language, and language is loaded with culture” (p.28). His assertion is later known as languaculture. This notion indicates that language and culture is built up upon an indivisible relationship, and that teaching language is not a value-free process. There have always been beliefs, values, and ideologies embedded in a language or in its teaching approach. This issue has also been a concern on Ricento’s (2000) publication as he stated that language ideology that is often connected with other ideologies would pose a challenge to the favourable outcome of its application. One of the ideologies brought by EMI, in this case, is the requirement of students’ active participations in the classroom activities. Alas, this ideology is often viewed as incompatible in Indonesia educational context. The traditional teacher-centred techniques that still dominates most of Indonesian school perceive active participations in the classroom as inappropriate because it is too noisy. This could be another significant reason why the implementation does not live up to the authority’s expectation. While teaching subjects through English as a medium of instruction in Indonesian schools are aimed to equip students with subjects’ knowledge as well as familiarize them with English, teaching activities in the class seems not to facilitate students to reach the final destinations. The teacher-centered view also sees the notion of freedom given to students to choose what they want to learn in the classroom as invalid. While permitting students to make choices about what and how they want to learn in the classroom will encourage them to participate and invest in both learning the subjects and using the language (Brown & Lee, 2015), the traditional view often neglects this striking aspect of a learning process. As a result, classroom activities tend to be monotonous and fail to motivate students to study. The conflicting ideology may also come from the use of English in school activities. While Indonesia adopts the ideology of one nation one national language that was marked by the declaration of the youth pledge in 1928 (Hannigan, 2015), the use of English as a replacement of Bahasa Indonesia in the public schools has raised a storm of controversy. The protest from the Indonesian people shows their

concerns about the possibility of the cultural change in Indonesian children. The problem can be prevented from happening if all aspects from education system are joined up together in the policy decision-making process. As the policy will influence not only teacher and students but potentially broader context, there is a need for the authority not to put their ideas in isolation from others. Joining-up together might contribute to a better outcome of the product such as the harmony of the approach and the testing system. We can see that the harmony is not reflected in the ministry of education decree. While the focus of SBI is on students' communicative competence, the fact that the government use TOEFL as an indicator of the goal achievement is highly questionable.

A DECADE OF EMI: REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

Although SBI program ended in 2013 as it received considerable critical responses, the spirit of EMI still exists in the school system in Indonesia, mainly from non-governmental institutions. Higher demands of English learning come from parents that are now becoming more aware of the need for English for their children. Parents' views of the language are pertinent to what Pennycook (1994) noted about English. He contends that English is perceived as a powerful tool that can determine one's status in the social, educational, and occupational settings. He later states that English is "a gatekeeper to a position of prestige in society" (p.14). Many private schools see this opportunity, and with highly renowned international curriculums (International Baccalaureate®, Cambridge IGCSE, and Montessori) these schools try to persuade many wealthy parents to send their children to their institutions. It does not take a long time for these schools to enjoy its popularity. International Baccalaureate® (2017) reports that there have been 31 schools offering IB programme at primary years and another 17 and 38 schools at middle years and diploma respectively. But do these schools with their English-as-a-medium-of-instruction feature successfully turn students into capable individual not only in term of using English but also acquiring the subject knowledge? Careful and intensive studies might be needed to answer such questions. But reflecting all those stated limitations gives us thought on the sense that ministry of education has not made enough efforts to translate the concept of English as a medium of instruction

as it is stated in their policy into feasible and attainable practices in the public-school classrooms. More mindful preparations rather than the palpable ego of the authorities that is often proved to steers them into producing a language-in-education policy without expressing detail instructions should have done to meet the context of the country and also to translate the language teaching approach into more practical steps is needed so that the implementation of it will not end as a waste of time and money.

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