

BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN INDONESIA: A CALL FOR ITS REIMPLEMENTATION IN THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes new ways of reimplementing a form of bilingual education in Indonesia. Bilingual education was once implemented at international standard schools in Indonesia but failed for some reasons. The authors propose a more suitable form of bilingual education in Indonesia based on language acquisition theories which suggest that bilingual education should be developed on the basis of content-based instruction focusing on visual and physical ways of teaching. In this respect, physical education and arts should be prioritised over mathematics, ICT, and science subjects.

KEYWORDS

bilingual education, bilingualism, immersion programme

INTRODUCTION

Knowing and mastering English as an international language is no longer a luxury or a privilege for the elite few; it has become a necessity for Indonesians who wish to seize future opportunities and access advanced technology and world economy. It would be great to gain knowledge of the international languages of the world. If people have such knowledge, intercommunication problems would cease to exist. In the meantime, however, globalization and of current trends like information highway necessitate the mastery of English as an international language.

For a developing country like Indonesia where people of many ethnic languages have been politically united under one national language, priority should be given to the building of bilingualism with equal proficient in two languages, English and Indonesian. Following current trends of education in the world, Indonesian government once decided to support the establishment of international standard schools (*Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional*) across the country. The establishment of international standard school is based on the Law of Education System No.20, 2003, paragraph 3 of article 50 stating that “Indonesian government administers at least one education unit at any grade to be improved as an international standard unit of education”.

At the international standard schools, English is used as a medium of instruction for prioritised subjects, namely Natural Sciences (Biology, Physics, and Chemistry), Mathematics, Information and Communication Technology, and English. The decision to choose the subjects has proved to be wrong as the subjects are more difficult to understand when they are taught in English due to teachers' and students' poor English competence. In some cities, schools labelled as *Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional* (SBI) have become a lucrative business serving children of the well-to-do parents; this fact is far cry from government's real purpose of establishing international standard schools in Indonesia. As a result, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia eventually abolished the SBI in 2013 (Jayanti & Sujarwo, 2019; More, 2011; Rosarians, 2013).

This paper proposes new ways of reimplementing a form of bilingual education in Indonesia. To begin with, the writers discuss the current development of English language teaching in Indonesia. Then, the writers review general perspectives of bilingualism, bilingual education, and immersion programme. This review serves as a springboard for drafting a proposal for better implementation of bilingual education in Indonesia.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN INDONESIA

English has been taught at Indonesian secondary schools since the Dutch colonialist era. Sadly, this language has never been spoken or used an official language like the case of India, Malaysia, Singapore, or other independent nations that adopted English as a second language. The possible reason is that the effect of British colonialism is barely palpable in Indonesia, and the United States was not Indonesia's close political ally during those periods (Dardjowidjojo, 1996). This situation is comparable to other Asian countries, such as China, Japan, and Thailand that similarly use English as a foreign language (Baker, 2008; Hui, 1997; Mori, 2004). Furthermore, an effort to propose English as a second language in 1950's was bore little success for at least two reasons. Firstly, Indonesian as the national language is actually the second language for Indonesian people. Most of them speak a local language before they learn Indonesian at school. Secondly, for some political reasons, Indonesian leaders and common people were not willing to support the use of English as the official language. English, therefore, remains a foreign language in Indonesia. The status of English has serious impacts on students of all educational levels. While it is a compulsory subject for primary school third graders to high school tenth graders, the time allotment for English teaching and learning is barely sufficient. At the secondary school, for instance, students only learn English for twice a week, 45 minutes each time. English is not prioritised and treated in the same way as they do the other general subjects (Dardjowidjojo, 1996; Sukono, 2002).

The general picture is even worse at Indonesian universities. English in non-English departments is only taught once or twice a week, each session lasts 100 minutes during the first two semesters. In some cases, English is even not taught at all because it is not a part of core courses. Academically, this is disadvantageous for the students since many of assigned readings and textbooks used or recommended by their lecturers are written in English.

In English Departments, students usually must make a lot of adjustments when they speak the language. Since their freshman days they confront the grim reality that they are expected to communicate in English. This period of adjustment could be problematic because English is not spoken as a community language. Most students have limited use of English where they come from and consequently, communicating in English is often a daunting task for them. Recently, however, some Indonesian universities have begun to take a progressive step by giving greater priority for English. They started implementing the policy of using English as a medium of instruction in international classes, asking students to regularly translate English materials into Indonesian, supporting the establishment of English clubs, having students speak in English when presenting their theses, and so on. Nevertheless, this ambitious effort has met some resistance and the policy is not adopted by all universities. This effort tends to be successful only in state and 'elite' private institutions where newly enrolled students already have some degree of English proficiency and skills that they acquired from their former schools (Masduqi, 2011; Sukono, 2002).

Communicative Approach has made its way to reform the English education in Indonesia as it was chosen as an instructional approach in the 1994 English curriculum. Thanks to *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) in the curriculum, there seemed to be a fundamental change in English teaching in which grammar and vocabulary are given less emphasis and students are encouraged to speak the language communicatively. Yet, due to the misinterpretation of oral-based language instructions and growing controversies among educators, this approach was redefined and replaced by the *Meaningfulness Approach* in the 1999 Curriculum (Huda, 1999 in Musthafa, 2001). Furthermore, the curriculum designers in Indonesia decided to adopt the *Contextual Teaching Learning* method in the 2004 Competency-Based Curriculum. The method which was also based on the communicative approach was then modified in the updated 2006 School-Based Curriculum. It should be noted that the competency-based learning of English at Indonesian primary and secondary schools actually shares the characteristics of communicative language teaching. Furthermore, in both approaches, learning outcomes are clearly determined, formed, and evaluated as discrete elements of measurement within specific contexts and situations. Thus, this actually represents the current trends of instruction instead of a fundamental paradigmatic shift in language teaching method (Marcellino, 2008; Masduqi, 2011).

Indonesian government developed the 2006 curriculum and implemented the 2013 curriculum. The new curriculum adopts aspects of character building education in most of the subjects in primary and secondary schools, including English (Kennedy, 2014). In relation to English language teaching and learning in secondary schools, Widodo (2016) argues that the approach in the 2013 curriculum is not suitable as it is heavily influenced by some form of scientific inquiry (observing, questioning, exploring or experimenting, associating, and communicating), which is traditionally applied in science subjects. The curriculum does not specifically discuss curriculum materials, pedagogy, and assessment, based on current theories of language teaching and learning, and therefore, does not optimally develop students' ability to become competent users of English.

As a result, English teachers often use approaches and instructional materials from both the 2006 curriculum and the 2013 curriculum, depending on their school's readiness to implement the 2013 curriculum.

BILINGUALISM

Bilingualism is a subject that defies definition. It involves a number of perspectives. In *Language* (1933), Bloomfield defines bilingualism, and his definition became an instant classic ever since. He argues that "in the extreme case of foreign language learning, the speaker becomes so proficient as to be indistinguishable from the native speakers round him... In the cases where this perfect foreign language learning is not accompanied by loss of the native language, it results in **bilingualism**, the native-like control of two languages" (Bloomfield, 1933, p. 55-56). Gearon (2005) says bilingualism refers to the state in which an individual is equally proficient in two languages. An Indonesian person living for a long time in Sydney may be considered a bilingual if he can use both Indonesian and English equally well. Therefore, a young Indonesian visitor to Sydney Opera House who is beginning to learn English may not be classified as a 'true' bilingual person.

Taking a different stance from the two previous experts, Baker and Jones (1998) argue that if we ask someone if s/he is bilingual or not, we are actually not raising one simple issue but at least five complicated issues. Firstly, there is a distinction between ability in language and use of language. A person may be able to speak two languages but tends to speak one language in practice. Alternatively, an individual may regularly speak two languages but tends to speak one language in practice. Secondly, an individual's proficiency in a language may vary across four language skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. A person may be orally proficient in one language, but he or she switches to another language in reading or writing. Thirdly, only few bilinguals are equally proficient in both languages, even though this is often thought to be the case. One language tends to be stronger and better developed than the other. This is described as the dominant language. Fourthly, few bilinguals possess the same competence as monolingual speakers in either of their languages. This is because bilinguals use their languages for different functions and purposes. Fifthly, a bilingual person's competence in a language may vary over time depending on changing circumstances. A person who relocates to a new neighbourhood where another language is spoken usually tends to gradually lose his native language. These five main issues show how difficult it would be to give concise and all-inclusive definitions of a bilingual person. They also show that many degrees of bilingualism may exist, sometimes varying in the same person over time.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Bilingual education would seem to describe a situation where two languages are used in a school. The term 'bilingual education' is, however, a simple label for a complex phenomenon. It is difficult to understand bilingual education except through the status, power, and politics of languages within a country.

This factor and others significantly influence people's decision in opting what types of bilingual education is appropriate for their community (Baker & Jones, 1998).

Furthermore, Baker and Wright (2017) state that there are at least seven types of bilingual education which are popular in the world. The first is Canadian *immersion education* or *immersion programme*. This programme is aimed for children to become bilingual and bicultural in French and English as well as to obtain normal achievement in the curriculum. Here, although French (L2) is used as the medium of instruction, English (L1) is still maintained and developed adequately. This programme was conceived in 1965 at the Saint Lambert School in Montreal, Quebec, Canada in response to the inefficiency of learning a second language in school by treating it exclusively as an academic subject. This will be discussed further in the next section.

The second is *dual language school*. It is delivered in two languages which is conventionally half of the day in one language and half in the other. A full range of courses is offered and the language of instruction for each discipline may vary. Throughout the world, dual language schools are created to serve the children of the international community whose parents work in international embassies, organisations, and businesses. For example, Jakarta International School serves the children of international embassies and businesses as well as local students of Indonesia.

The third is *two-way bilingual education*. This type of bilingual education is established to simultaneously serve children of linguistic minorities and English speakers. The goal is to develop fluency in two languages for both sets of students and to encourage both groups to respect each other's cultural backgrounds. The advantage of this program is that students learn languages and acquire positive attitudes toward cultures not only from instruction but also from their interactions, because in this program there are native speakers of both languages studying together. For instance, the Amigos program in Cambridge, Massachusetts has consistently divided instruction equally in English and Spanish.

The fourth is *maintenance bilingual education*. It serves exclusively language minority students. This program seeks to develop and maintain the native language of the students and promote positive attitude toward the native culture while also achieving proficiency in English. Literacy and subject matter instruction in both languages play an important role to achieve the goal. For example, Rough Rock School in Arizona uses Navajo (the minority language) and English as the languages of instruction.

The fifth is *transitional bilingual education*. This program is aimed to develop English skills without jeopardizing or delaying the learning of content courses. The native language is still used while the students are learning English. Gradually the students take more subjects in English until they can be totally mainstreamed. However, the greatest emphasis lies on language development.

This is practised at South Boston High School where bilingual teachers teach in the mainstream program bilingually.

The sixth is *submersion*. It is a modified version of transitional bilingual education for schools with few students; each grade/level places students in the mainstream classroom and pulls them out daily for native language and ESL support. The purpose is mainly to help students with their work in the mainstream classes. For example, a school in Boston where a Japanese-speaking teacher and two English-speaking teachers who have some limited knowledge of Japanese language help 65 Japanese students who are assigned to mainstream classes according to grade level.

The seventh is *integrated bilingual education*. This program serves students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Although the overall goals of the program is similar to transitional bilingual education, it also aims to support bilingual students and mix them with mainstream students by increasing the academic and social contexts, exposing English-speaking students to other languages and cultures and sensitizing mainstream teachers to the educational needs of bilingual students. This type of bilingual education is developed successfully at schools in Massachusetts.

Regardless of the typology of bilingual education, Gearon (2005) says that any type of bilingual education should establish equal development proficiency in minority (native) language that is used at home and majority (mainstream) language that is used dominantly in the community. It is not advisable to direct students to have a good mastery of dominant language by sacrificing their native language.

IMMERSION PROGRAMME

Immersion programme is a strong form of bilingual education. This program was initiated in 1965 at the Saint Lambert School in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. This programme was born out of people's reaction to the inefficiency of learning a second language in schools that treated the language as an academic subject. The program basically proposed that students be assisted to acquire the second language through its habitual use as a medium of instruction and of social relations in the school without losing normal achievement in the curriculum (Swain & Johnson, 1997).

Immersion programme also supports equal development of proficiency in the first and second languages. The two languages are used to teach the curriculum, although the medium of instruction is the second language. In this notion, language learning begins to merge with content teaching (Gearon, 2005)

In view of the principles above, it can be justified that immersion program which emphasises on the use of second language as a medium of instruction is in accordance with the recent idea of second language acquisition that second language is learned by being used (Long, 1983). The basic goal of immersion programme, therefore, is to bring school into a large and natural L2 use/acquisition context (Baker and Jones, 1998).

Since immersion program equally maintains the development of the first and second languages, no one should worry about the 'loss' of Indonesian as a formal language at Indonesian schools. Here, immersion program is designed not only to build upon the foundation of second language acquisition, but also to protect Indonesian people's right to speak and preserve their national language.

POLITICAL AND EDUCATIONAL ADVANTAGES

Baker and Wright (2017) state that any form of bilingual education, including immersion program, is closely connected to fundamental beliefs and politics in the society. They further claim that three orientations of languages (i.e. *language as a problem*, *language as a right*, and *language as a resource*) are the basic arguments behind the politics of bilingualism and bilingual education.

Language as a problem involves personality and social problems (e.g. split identity and low self-esteem) and political problems (e.g. regional conflicts and national disunity). In this case, bilingual education is used as a win-win solution to tackle those problems (Baker & Wright, 2017). By establishing immersion programme in Indonesia, we can potentially enhance Indonesian students' self-esteem and identity and prepare them to learn how to confidently live and to cope with complexity, uncertainty, and diversity in the modern world. Furthermore, students will be able to experience and appreciate the diversity because of their exposure to different cultures that range from the multi various ethnic groups in Indonesia to technological and global changes that affect western culture. This exposure will be instrumental in fostering Indonesian social and political unity and preventing students from feeling culturally privileged or marginalized.

Language as a right means any individual or group deserves to choose language as well as to participate in bilingual education (Baker & Wright, 2017). Based on this principle, immersion programme maintains the development of the foreign/second and first languages (English and Indonesian). The equal development of both languages is the key reason why immersion programme values Indonesian people's language right: the right to choose and use language.

Considering that immersion programme originated from Canada, this programme is designed as an optional programme in Indonesia. This programme is not compulsory, and its success depends on the positive attitude and motivation of students who join it on the voluntary basis (Swain & Johnson, 1997). In addition, a successful immersion programme will not only help promote the school itself but also potentially become another appealing feature of Indonesian education in general.

Finally, *language as a resource* means that language is viewed as personal and national resources. This idea mainly refers to the perks of being bilingual speakers for academic and economic purposes (Baker & Wright, 2017). In this notion, through the acquisition of English in the immersion programme, Indonesia will be able to produce human resources with the ability to digest useful ideas from the advanced western literature

and the prospect to transfer and apply them to the scientific and technological development in Indonesia. Furthermore, the immersion programme will create good English and Indonesian users, those who are able to apply their knowledge of the two languages when they participate in global business transactions and to catch up with the advancement of international free market economy for the sake of economic development of their motherland.

THE CONTRIBUTION ON STUDENT'S SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

The topics of bilingualism and second language acquisition are strongly connected to each other. Being a bilingual person often involves second language acquisition, either formally (e.g. classroom meetings, tutorials, lectures) or informally (e.g. through social interactions, via radio and television). At the same time, research into bilingualism often deals with the topic of second language acquisition (Baker & Wright, 2017). It should be noted that some Indonesian students, particularly those living in urban areas, accept English as their second language because they only speak Indonesian at home. This is due to the fact that they are either from families who do not speak an ethnic language, or their parents encourage the use of Indonesian only at home.

The success of bilingual education employing immersion principles has given some qualified support to the Krashen's view that comprehensible input is sufficient to support learners' second language acquisition (Baker & Wright, 2017). This point of view is inherent in Chomsky's generative idea of universal grammar which enables people to internalise grammars and produce grammatical sentences which they have not heard or seen. The argument is developed in a different form by Krashen who distinguishes between (conscious) learning and (subconscious) acquisition of language. In a naturalistic setting of immersion program, students potentially acquire a second language through interactions, where learners construct their own rules in accordance with the comprehensible input (Ellis, 2008).

In the interest of second language acquisition, teachers of immersion programme give students adequate quantitative and qualitative comprehensible input. In this case, input that is sufficient not only for comprehension – that is what teachers mostly concentrate on – but also serves as the basis of production in which teacher gives the students opportunities to speak the second language as often as possible. Providing comprehensible input, however, should suit the stage of the development stage of second language learner (Krashen, 1982, cited in Ellis, 2008).

At last, in genuinely bilingual education like immersion programme where the second language is the medium of instruction, the focus is more on meaning than on form (Baker & Wright, 2017). This notion suits the current trend of learning activities in which the teacher facilitates his/her students to see positive reasons why they do something in their class. In so doing, a communication-oriented class can be created.

It is through meaningful activities that the students learn some things of personal relevance in the activities they are doing, so that they will be motivated to engage with the lesson.

REASONS FOR PARTIAL IMMERSION PROGRAMME

For over three decades, immersion programs have been an influential education feature all over the world. In most of these programs, students receive all or much of their instruction throughout the curriculum using the medium of the L2. The programs usually commence in Kindergarten (Prep) (early immersion), Years 3 or 4 (middle immersion) or Years 7 or 8 (late immersion).

Early total immersion programs initially teach the entire curriculum in L2 reducing 40-50 per cent by Year 6, with English language and arts introduced in Years 2 or 3. Early total immersion programs usually have monolingual, bilingual and maintenance phases. While early partial immersion programs teach half the curriculum content in L2, late immersion programs initially offer 55-75 per cent of the curriculum in L2, with a reduction to 40 per cent in the second or third year of the program (de Courcy, 2002).

While immersion program is seen as a novelty Indonesia, it is worth trying at primary school level where students already have had good command of Indonesian. Thus, the immersion programme proposed at the primary school level is inclusive of late immersion programme. To make it sense, the late immersion programme will offer 75 per cent of the curriculum in L2, with a reduction to 50 per cent in the second or third year of the program. In addition, Indonesian is spoken as the first language, while English is the second language and serves as the medium of instruction.

The late immersion programme chosen for primary school level is based primarily on students' second language acquisition. Children who are naturally exposed to L2 at early ages acquire the language better than later starters, because they have ample time to learn and master the language. Children are not burdened with the same concerns and responsibilities as adults who are learning a foreign language (e.g., necessary immediate competence in communication for jobs, etc), and therefore concentrate more on acquiring the pronunciation with greater success (Ellis, 2008).

The early introduction of a second language may give children a link between home and school, raise the status of the first language and their parents who use it, and enable them to develop it beyond the essentials of the home domain before their second language and cognitive levels exceed the level of their first language. The early acquisition of a second language should not be perceived as a preparation for something else. It should be part of the overall educational experience of primary school children. The enthusiasm shown by young children acquiring a second language is often a good indication of this (Brisk & Harrington, 2015).

REASON FOR THE CONTENT AREAS

The immersion programme proposed for primary school level is developed upon the basis of content-based instruction. The view of content-based instruction allows school to choose subjects that can potentially develop students second language acquisition through visual and physical approaches. In other words, subjects to be taught in the target language are carefully selected, and each subject contributes to the total second language development (de Courcy, 2002).

Based on the principle of content-based instruction above, the following subjects should be highlighted:

1. physical education
2. arts (drawing, music, and drama)

Firstly, and foremost, physical education should be prioritised because as a 'recreational' and 'rigorous' subject with a strong verbal component, it promotes links between second language and psychomotor development. The verbal component is particularly useful to aid comprehension at the early stage of second language development. In addition to being a 'doing' subject which introduces speech acts and vocabulary relating to human activities, physical education sharpens listening skills (Coral, 2017; de Courcy, 2000).

Arts takes the second place due to its creative nature. Arts, drawing in particular, does not only present basic concepts (e.g., of colour and size), emotional expressions (e.g., liking, disliking), and opportunities to perform requests (e.g., requesting art and craft utensils), but also enables the teacher to actively navigate the classroom and interact with individuals and small groups. This relationship polishes up the acquisition of second language either directly or indirectly. In the case of music, the subject facilitates an essential link between language and culture. Both subjects assist the development of listening and speaking skills. Social studies introduce concepts from the domestic, work and institutional domains, and music, among other things, introduces patterns that can be internalised. Another subject which has proved rather successful as a basis for a component of second language acquisition is drama, because of its emphasis on role play. In this way, in the later years the role play competence can complement the reading program. Attempts to vary the subjects taught in L2 have increased the subjects' value to second language acquisition (de Courcy, 2002).

CONCLUSION

The advent of globalization, free market economy and rapid advancement of science and technology today necessitate the mastery of English as an international language. For a developing country like Indonesia, immersion programme has the potentials to produce bilingual people (competent speakers/users of Indonesian and English), to address the challenges of the global world, so it merits consideration.

From the political perspective, immersion program as a strong form of bilingual education will provide students a conducive atmosphere in dealing with various cross-cultural experiences; such an ability is essential for the affirmation of Indonesian national unity. Meanwhile, for the sake of educational benefits, a successful immersion programme will help promote the school itself and add a positive feature of Indonesian education in general. In addition, through the acquisition of English in the immersion programme, Indonesia will be able to boost future generations' ability to participate in the global business and international free market economy.

Since the idea of immersion programme is relatively new in Indonesia, it is advisable to implement the inclusive late immersion programme by teaching 75 per cent of the curriculum in English, with a 50 per cent reduction in the second or third year. The programme needs to be developed on the basis of content-based instruction covering physical education and arts, such as drawing, music, and drama.

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Contents

- 1 **Foreword from the Head of the Department of English**
Suharyadi
- 3 **Foreword from the Coordinator of the Research Group on Linguistics**
Yazid Basthomi
- 5 **Editorial Notes**
Nurenzia Yannuar
- 7 **Situasi Kebahasaan di Indonesia di Era Globalisasi**
Katharina Endriati Sukamto
- 20 **Mari Merawat dan Melestarikan Kekayaan Bahasa di Indonesia**
Yassir Nasanius
- 32 **Javanese in the Linguistic Landscape of the Municipality of Malang, Indonesia**
Siusana Kweldju
- 56 **Autoethnography of a Multilingual Speaker: Constructing a Javanese Identity**
Nurenzia Yannuar
- 70 **Ndapetno and Ngetawakno: Lexical Invention in the Javanese Narratives of Multilingual Children**
Evynurul Laily Zen
- 84 **Bilingual Education in Indonesia: A Call for Its Reimplementation in the National Context**
Harits Masduqi and Arif Subiyanto
- 97 **Spilling out Pedagogic Expectations and Actions: Students' Thesis Proposals in English Language Studies**
Yazid Basthomi and Widya Hanum Sari Pertiwi
- 109 **Forensics and Neuro-linguistics: A Glimpse of the Contributions of Linguistics to Other Fields**
Johannes A. Prayogo
- 129 **The Rain**
Beleven Khristmawan and Herditya Wahyu Widodo
- 152 **Prof. A. Effendi Kadarisman and His “Kapang”**
M. Misbahul Amri

- 163 **Offering Common Thoughts on Kadarisman's
"Uncommon Thoughts on Common Things"**
Maria Hidayati and Nabhan F. Chiron
- 178 **Erich Segal's Love Story: Different Semiotic Modes
in Book and Film Formats**
Yusnita Febrianti
- 189 **Prof. Effendi Kadarisman: A Linguist of English, Arabic,
and Javanese, Who Loves Poetry**
Aulia Apriana
- 204 **Author Short Biographies**