

A Review of English Language Policy and Its Implication to Indonesian Education Sector:

Primary school level

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Abstract—This study is an attempt to give a descriptive review on the development of English in primary schools. Additional data about the practical consequences of this recent policy to schools are also provided. To achieve those purposes, the data were collected from relevant article journals as well as any pertinent documents, completed by an observation in a kindergarten and interviews with some principals and teachers. As a result, English never becomes the compulsory subject in primary schools. In addition, the latest English language status, as extracurricular subject, causes the deviating impacts to some schools, such as in a suburban area. Specifically, schools with good supporting factors (qualified teacher resources, enough infrastructure, and abundant budget) use English for their school ‘branding’; in contrast, schools which have any restraint in funding prefer to delete English subject in those schools.

Keywords—English language policy; extracurricular subject; primary schools

I. INTRODUCTION

The position of English in Indonesian primary education is arguable. Some educators deem that familiarizing English to children is too early and risky since it potentially threatens our nationalism [1]. This assumption is also followed by the issue that introducing English in the initial age is considered inappropriate. It is based on the result of over fifty year-studies, showing that people who began learning foreign language at secondary stage gave better performance than those who started learning it in the childhood [2]. Put differently, English is claimed not necessary to be taught to primary students.

Nevertheless, a different perspective on this issue also comes from others. Many scholars argue that children in Indonesia need to learn English to confront the challenge of ASEAN economic society (1). It is also supported by the statement that the demand of English in primary school is unquestionable [3]. In the perspective of neurolinguistic study, learning second language in the early stage could give advantages to the learners; they are, developing their brain in electrical activity, functioning to help learners’ capacity in their future learning [4,5]. Not only those viewpoints, but also the voice of parents mostly was not consonant with this policy [6]. Even, it is noted that English needs to be repositioned in the

curriculum [7]. In short, English is claimed very important to be taught since the beginning level.

Several studies have been undertaken to discuss English policy in primary education. One of them is a descriptive study done by Lestari discussing whether English should be compulsorily taught or not [8]. Specifically, this study deliberates that the initial thing to consider was the policy maker’s effort to control the teaching practice of English as the local content since there were still some issued to be encountered; such as, the teachers’ readiness, the supporting facilities, syllabus, and so on. Another researcher also examined the policy of English in Indonesian primary education [9]. He focused his paper on the policy development, instructional factors as well as the English teachers. One of the results revealed that the officialization of English in primary education level is a fundamental thing to do. Seeing this, most of the previous researches deliberate English when it was still included in intra-curriculum; therefore, more comprehensive studies on the recent adjustment of the policy; that is, English is now out from primary school curriculum, are still very few. Therefore, this study provides the descriptive review on the latest English policy in elementary stages and the practical impacts of its rule to primary schools.

II. METHOD

Systematic review was undertaken to gather the data since September up to November 2018. This appraisal comes from twenty-two relevant online journal articles and other relatable government documents. For journal articles, the keywords used in the data collecting process involve ‘language policy in Indonesia, language policy in education in Indonesia, language education in primary schools in Indonesia.’ Further, this review also is supported by other data resulting from the interviews with a principal in a public elementary school, a principal and two teachers of bilingual kindergarten, and an English teacher in an Islamic elementary school. One-week observation was also conducted to see how English was taught in a bilingual kindergarten and in the Islamic primary school. Specifically, those institutions were chosen because they are in the similar part of Garut; that is, in the centre of Garut, therefore, the sociocultural background of people surrounding is similar.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part elaborates two findings; the review of English policy in Indonesia primary schools, and the impacts of the current English status in primary schools.

A. *The Development of English Position in Primary Education Sector*

After proclaimed Independent, Indonesia chose English, not Dutch as its first foreign language. There were two basic reasons of this option; first, Dutch was the colonists' language; second, it did not have international standing [10]. The status of English was firstly announced formally in 1955 at a conference of teacher trainers. At that time, the foremost head of the *Central Inspectorate of English Language Instruction* in the Ministry of Education emphasized that English was for neither daily language nor second official language, yet it should be the first foreign language [11]. Seeing this, Huda as cited in Lauder argues that Indonesia will not select English as the second language since it is assumed potentially harmful for Indonesia itself [11,12].

In education sector, English was officially set in the 1989 law, particularly, in chapter IX, section 39, verse 3 that English is a compulsory subject in secondary levels and it also may be taught in the primary schools (see also the government regulation no 28, 1990). However, a debate among educators came up to determine the starting age when children could be taught English since in the government regulation number 27, English was not explicitly included in kindergarten education [11]. Afterwards, the emphasis of English teaching in primary schools was uttered by the Ministry of Education in a formal meeting in 1992 that English could be initially started to be taught in elementary school starting from grade 4 as the local content [8] for two to four hours per week [10]. Further, this is strengthened by Decree Number 60 1993 that primary schools can include English in their curriculum if they can fulfil some requirements; they are, schools are equipped by the qualified teachers, and the environment surrounding schools (society) demands English to be taught [13]. Moreover, the legalization of this policy was tangibly mentioned in the Decree of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Chapter VIII, that English could be put in the school curriculum, provided that, it would not disrupt the objective of our national education curriculum.

In response to this, numerous schools as well as parents hailed this rule. Even, some schools enclosed English as intra-curricular as well as extracurricular subject [8]. This rejoinder is parallel to Huda that those who learn foreign language in the early age will get wider opportunity to achieve high proficiency of the target language [14]. Another high interest of English was also shown by the proposal to the upsurge of English status becoming a compulsory subject was also discussed among educators [8]. Put differently, English at primary schools was very welcomed by schools and society at that time.

In consonance with this, there are two basic purposes of teaching English in both primary and secondary levels; they are, to develop children's readiness in understanding English texts in colleges, as well as to face the global demand in the future job market [10]. Nevertheless, because of the English status as local content subject, the government did not provide

any English syllabus and give its authority to the local government board [8]. Therefore, every school has an authority to adapt the syllabus from regional board and fit it to its needs and purpose. As an example, the local government in East Java legalized local English syllabus by targeting 5000 vocabulary items to be mastered by primary school students [8,15].

At the beginning of 2000, parents in Indonesia were attentive to English primary education. They pondered that their children were better to be taught English at the early stage [13]. This opinion resulted from their prediction that English literate would be demanded in the upcoming eras. The parents' request made many schools mused English in their curriculum, even starting from grade one. Seeing this, many principles of those schools recruited the teachers who graduated from either English or non-English education program [13]. This reflected that English could be taught by teachers from any background of education. Therefore, this phenomenon brought out some critics and comments from educators.

Afterwards, in Decree of Ministry of National Education 2006 no 22 [16], the government shifts the time when English can be offered to be taught at school; that is, earlier than grade 4. In practice, teachers have 2 x 35 minutes per session. This is also elaborated in the decree of Ministry of National Education No 23 2006 that English becomes a local content subject learnt by elementary school from class one to six, with four macro skills as the goals; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Those schools were proposed to apply Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), called as the 2004 curriculum, which was also modified into School-Based Curriculum (the 2006 curriculum). This curriculum was aimed at advancing the communication in English, understanding the language system as well as the cultural aspects of English, and acquiring the macro skills of English, language components, and cultural aspects of English expressions in both written and spoken [17].

Thenceforward, Indonesia extended the commitment to English by establishing the policy for International Standard School in 2006. This is based on Indonesian Constitution No. 20 year 2003, stating that National Government and regional or local government undertake at least one school which is categorized as international standardized school (SBI). This program was quite massively followed by hundred schools, as an instance, 318 schools from secondary to high levels [18]. Further, it is stated that there are some models of this school type; one of them by combining school curriculum with Cambridge curriculum under international institution certificate [18]. Basically, this development is aimed at meeting Indonesian public schools with International standard [19]. Hence, primary and secondary school students in Indonesia had wide rooms to compete with other students across the globe.

The radical transference was palpably uncovered in the latest curriculum in Indonesia; curriculum 2013. This curriculum removes English as the local content in primary school curriculum. This alteration is based on the philosophical value of this curriculum that is, developing children's character building through democratic education which adapts the religion, cultural, as well as social values [13]. In addition to this, this current policy is also in line with the decision of constitutional court in cancelling government regulation

number 50 2003 section 50 verse 3 about International School Stubs (RSBI) and International School (SBI). This cancellation was officially announced in January, 8 2013 since it is assumed against 1945 constitution, paragraph 3, article 31, mentioning that Indonesia should develop national education, not international one [20]. It means that all international standard schools in Indonesia must be discontinued. This was also relevant to the policy makers' worry on the potential drawback of English to our national identity [20,21]. Another assumption underlying this policy is also stated by Hadisantosa language loss will potentially happen to Indonesia if English is introduced in the early age [1]. Therefore, it can be inferred that there is no any urgency for Indonesian students to learn English in their age which may not adapt the indigenous as well as our cultural values [13]. In other words, English today is not included in the primary school curriculum. English shifts from local content to be extracurricular subject, meaning that it can be included or deleted in schools.

B. The Effects of Current English Language Policy to Primary Education in a Suburban Area

Below is the portrait of English in public and private primary schools in Garut as influenced by the latest English Language Policy in Indonesia.

1) *English in a public elementary school:* As the interview result with a Headmaster of a public elementary school in Garut, English is deleted because of some reasons. First, today English only becomes as extracurricular subject; therefore, there is no any compulsory to have English class in the elementary school's curriculum. Second, this school does not have any independent funding for handling this extracurricular subject; such as, providing learning materials, and paying the teacher's salary. Third, the teachers who teach English will not be registered in the administrative online data base, meaning that the teaching hour for this subject is not counted. In addition, the Headmaster explained that when English was still as the local content, the English teachers were not from English major. This is in line with the statement that teachers handle English class come from other subject domains; math, Indonesian, others [22].

2) *English in a private islamic elementary school:* As the depiction, English in this school starts from grade 1 for two credit hours per week. The teacher provides the learning materials as well as the learning target by herself. This is due to the absence of the standardized English curriculum. After classroom observation in class one was done, it was uncovered that students focus on identifying things and constructing simple sentences. It is also strengthened by the teacher's statement that she prefers to introduce simple things around in English. She said that she also had a difficulty to determine the learning target; then, after she found the students still unfamiliar with English, she thought vocabulary needed to be taught first. Therefore, she collected the materials and compiled them into a book. In terms of administrative case, this teacher must teach other subjects which are included in

intra-curricular subject in order to be officially listed as the teacher in this school.

3) *English in a commercial kindergarten:* Different from the condition in the public school as mentioned above, the impact of 'no English for kids' is benefited by a kindergarten in Garut. Basically, this full-English school which has been established for about five years shown a breakthrough, that was, holding western curriculum; Montensory and IB to teach students. Peculiarly, there are three major programs of this school; they are, pre-school, KI, and K2. The data from observation also reveal that teachers use English in giving instruction, explaining materials, and reporting students' progress to parents.

In addition, the interview session with teachers also show that the teachers in this schools must fulfil some requirements; one of them is being fluent in English speaking with the TOEFL score at least 500. Therefore, most of the instructors are novice teachers who are graduated from English education program. Different from other kindergarten teachers who finish their school time at 10-11 AM, these teachers can go home at 4 PM. It means that after teaching the pupils in 12 o'clock, they must do other tasks; like preparing teaching materials, doing portfolios, and discussing the school program. Another compulsory program for the teachers is following the regular trainings from the central school in Jakarta regularly.

In the practice, the number of students in this school is about fifty students, and most of parents come from mid to high economic status. This is also seen from the school monthly fee which is about four to five times from other regular kindergartens. It is reasonable because this school has a lot of theme-based program which needs some budgeting; such as, conducting some luxurious art performances. In short, parents who do not have any problems in economics could send their children to this commercial school.

IV. CONCLUSION

As the inference, English in primary education is considered not necessary to be taught in the primary schools since the government never puts English as a compulsory subject, yet as additional one. Exactly, as the impact of the Up-to-the-minute status of English as extracurricular class in Garut, primary schools sufficiently equipped by the financial factor, teacher resources, as well as parents' support, still able to provide English as a part of their curriculum. However, for schools which have not been well established in terms of economy and human resources, English is not included in their school program.

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