The Future of English Language Teaching for Primary Schools in Indonesia: Issues and Challenges

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper highlights issues and challenges in teaching English in primary schools in Indonesia. It then moves on to addressing a more contextualized question pertaining to the phenomenon of National curriculum for primary schools and the quality of primary English teachers and also the ‘appropriate’ model of competence Indonesian teachers of English that should be adopted for future education. Above all, it is a challenge that can be met with adequate planning and preparation though it will be also costly in terms of human and resources.

**Keywords:** The Future of English Teaching, English, primary schools, issues and Challenges

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**Introduction**

Indonesia is the world’s fourth most populous country (500 ethnics, more than 500 local languages) and Bahasa Indonesia is used as official language in all school levels, while the formal status of English is a foreign language is taught and dedicated to academic purpose in order to introduce English as a global language. English Language Teaching in school generally can be described as follows: English in Elementary School, by introducing young learners with foreign language, beside their native & national language (Suyanto, 1997), English in Secondary School by developing English skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Mustafa, 2001), and English in University that is given more autonomy, depend on the department or ESP. However, In Indonesia, the global push to teach English at ever younger ages in formal instructional settings is a fairly recent phenomenon.

Nowadays, throughout the world teaching English at the primary level is fast becoming the norm and English is more and more a component of basic education rather than a component of foreign language teaching in the secondary school. Such a shift in policy has given a profound impact on most educational systems as a new subject that has to be accomodated in the primary curriculum with the implications for the human and material resources needed to support the introduction of this new subject. In line with that policy, changes are not just necessary in the new grade levels in which English is introduced—whether this is in 1st grade or later in primary cycle- but throughout the entire system as earlier introduction of a subject inevitably requires adjustment to the curriculum and materials in all subsequent grades.

**The Problem Finding in Primary Schools**

When once decision has been made, then to teach a language to a particular age group which has not received instruction in the English language previously need more considerations that all manner of other factors will come into play which are common to systematic educational reform for any subject area which in reality the government faced the several problem in practices, such as the lack of linguistic input, the unsupportive school culture and environment, the lack of teachers' English proficiency, teacher commitment, the inappropriate curriculum materials and learning - teaching approaches to the age group, and the most important is the benefit of such a change for children's learning in the early grades and subsequent learning in higher grades (Kabilan, 2009). Quality of teachers have a direct impact on quality of teaching is good or bad, and the main purpose of primary school English teaching is to train students interested in learning English as a Foreign Language. Primary school in Indonesia, English teachers in the enlightenment of the quality and standard of teaching becomes even more important. According to statistics, the number of full-time teachers in English
primary schools in our city a serious shortage. 

investigate, we found a considerable number of 

primary school English teachers in 

professional background is not English, and 

many other professional teaching career 

change to teach English part-time teachers 

everywhere. The phenomenon of the English 

quality of non-English primary school teachers 

is reflected in the English pronunciation and 

intonation is not accurate enough, poor spoken 

English, basic solid enough, not to mention the 

level of English language and scientific theory 
capability. some teachers simply can not do 

English classes.

The ideal and The reality in Primary 

Schools

Many of the arguments for the 

introduction of English into primary schools 

are based on a perception that, in language 

learning, “the erlist the better” (Mithcell and 

Myles, 2004) is sound educational principle. 

This principle derived from research into first 

language acquisition (L1) and the simultaneous 

acquisition of two languages by bilingual 

children. In these cases young children acquire 

language seemingly effortlessly, irrespective 

of the particular language and the quality of 

input they receive. The studies into second 

language acquisition by children in the second 

language environment indicate that they will 

acquire fluency in their second language (L2) 

and there are fixed developmental paths in 

their acquisition of a particular language. 

What might happen to Indonesia which has 

never been subject to English-speaking 

colonialism, find adequate struggling in this 

process into formal educational settings, 

particularly in compulsory education that other 

important factors come into play, such as the 

materials used, the levels of training of 

teachers, the commitment of teachers, and 

even public, attitudes towards the target 

language since that language and culture are 

intricately intertwined is hardly indisputable.

It must then, be recognized that there 

are fundamental differences in the conditions 

of learning between L1 or L2 acquisition by 

young children in naturalistic settings and L2 

acquisition in instructional settings since the 

primary schools students especially do not use 

the target language in everyday 

communication in social society. It is open the 

considerable evidence that in instructional 

settings “the younger the better” is not 

necessary true as far as children’s acquisition 
of second/foreign language is concerned. It is 
supported by Lightbown ( 200:449) clarified 
that for many years, classroom-based research 
had suggested that instructional settings, the 
age at which instruction began was less 
important that the intensity of the instruction 
and the continuation of exposure over a 
sufficient period of time. Meaning that the 
environment plays the important roles for 
children to expose intensively their target 
language since the process was spread out over 
a longer time and it is more than clear that the 
students in a foreign language setting wil not 
become experts of english in one hour a day-
which wold be a luxury in terms of 

instructional time in most school settings.

The other phenomenon is the 

subtractive bilingualism is documented when 
in situations, children use L2 for formal 
education and if the goals of learning do not 
actively promote retention of children’s L1 
then there is a danger that they may shift to the 
L2 which replaces their L1. It can be said that 
the intensity of the exposure and the 

opportunity to continue using the language 
over a long period of time is as important as 
the starting age in the effectiveness of 

classroom instruction.

The Primary English Curriculum: 

Challenges

Decision about whether or when to 

commence instruction in a foreign language 

may or may not be made on the grounds of 

reliable research evidence. However, once a 
decision is made to introduce English into 

primary grades or to starting at an earlier grade 
in the primary cycle, the implementing the 
curriculum reform must be begun. Meaning 
that change in one area of the system generally 
entails change in all other areas as earlier 
starting ages for a subject inevitably mean that 
the knowledge base at subsequent levels is 
different. For example that teaching using 

English at primary 3 when it used to be taught 
at primary 5 means that the curriculum, 
syllabus, and textbooks for primary 5 and all 
grades beyond to the end of formal schooling 
must be revised. As we know that curriculum
development is a complex and time-consuming process and a curriculum for primary school children need to be realted to their age, their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development. When the curriculum has been renewed, the government should consider the readiness of human and materials resources and adequate time that need to be available in order to support the realistic goals of introducing English in all subjects at primary schools. There are some considerations of using textbooks and other materials which are the essential tools for teachers related to the curriculum and the students as well. Textbooks is not just writing ‘Textbooks but also “Teachers Books and Workbooks” at the same time.

Instead of Textbooks should be developed in order to expose English teaching and learning in classroom, the change of teachers should be implemented in the sense of self competence and self-concept. The key component of implementing any curriculum reform program is Teacher training development. These training programs should be implemented to solve teachers’ competence problem in English. Not only that, English training program also should be given to all subject teachers since in reality they do not have adequate English proficiency. In deal with teaching and learning methods, There are 3 (three) change that must be required by teachers; first, at the level of English proficiency, second, at the level of curriculum and materials, third at the level of behaviour, and fourth, at the level of belief and principles underlying new approaches.

Even the pilot period has been implemented in limited number of schools and it has engaged to time, energy and resources (both human and materials), but the government still need to evaluate the ‘improved curriculum project’ and kind of care and attention given to teachers by Curriculum Development Centre in order to sustain a similar guidance educational system. Differential treatment in terms of attention and resources for different teachers in the various phases of implementation will have inevitable consequences in terms of acceptance and take-up new curriculum by teachers. It is a challenge that can be met with adequate planning and preparation though it will be also costly in terms of human and resources.

Conclusion

Indonesia is the world’s fourth most populous country (500 ethnics, more than 500 local languages) and Bahasa Indonesia is used as official language in all school levels, while the formal status of English is a foreign language is taught and dedicated to academic purpose in order to introduce English as a global language. When once decision has been made, then to teach a language to a particular age group which has not received instruction in the English language previously need more considerations that all manner of other factors will come into play which are common to systematic educational reform for any subject area which in reality the government faced the several problem in practices, such as the lack of linguistic input, the unsupportive school culture and environment, the lack of teachers’ English proficiency, teacher commitment, the inappropriate curriculum materials and learning - teaching approaches to the age group, and the most important is the benefit of such a change for children’s learning in the early grades and subsequent learning in higher grades. Therefore giving Teacher training development and the use of appropriate textbooks are recommended to overcome these problems. All educational innovation is complex and time consuming. Curriculum change, like any other form of change, should be seen as a process, and one which needs to be managed. Differential treatment in terms of attention and resources for different teachers in the various phases of implementation will have inevitable consequences in terms of acceptance and take-up new curriculum by teachers. It is a challenge that can be met with adequate planning and preparation though it will be also costly in terms of human and resources.

REFERENCES


