

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

Ferra Dian Andanty and Siyaswati

English Education Department of University of PGRI Adi Buana at Surabaya

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

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.

Nowdays, 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 impications for the human and material rsources 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 goverment 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 earlier 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 (2004:449) clarified that for many years, classroom-based research had suggested that instructional settings, the age at which instruction began was less important than 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 will not become experts of English in one hour a day-which would 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 related 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 dealt 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

- Alexander, R.J. (1984). *Primary Teaching*. London; Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Alptekin, C. (1993). Target-language culture in EFL materials. *ELT Journal*, 47(2), 136-143.
- Clark, J.L. (1987). *Curriculum Renewal in School Foreign Language Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

- Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a global language*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hayes, D. (2004). Approaches to In-service Trainer and Teacher Development in Vietnam to Support Curriculum Renewal. Capacity Building for Upper Secondary Education project; Unpublished paper.
- Kabilan, M.K., et al (2009). Difficulties and Problems of Learning English in extremely Rural Primary Schools: Implications of Materials Development. *Proceeding* ISBN: 978-84-612-7578-6 page.1074, Spain.
- Kirkpatrick, A. (2007). Teaching English across cultures: what do English teachers need to know to know how to teach English. *EA Journal*, 23(2), 20-36.
- McKay, S.L. (2003). Toward an appropriate EIL pedagogy: re-examining common ELT assumptions. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 13(1), 1-22.
- Modiano, M. (2001). Linguistic imperialism, cultural integrity, and EIL. *ELT Journal*, 55(4), 339-346.
- Mukarto et al. (2007). *English on Sky 3 for Junior High School Students Year IX*. Penerbit Erlangga: Jakarta.
- Nault, D. (2006). Going global: Rethinking culture teaching in ELT contexts. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 19(3), 314-328.