
LANGUAGE PLANNING: ENGLISH LANGUAGE STATUS AND ACQUISITION IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Language planning is the deliberate shaping of a language or its spheres of usage to achieve particular ends (Tonkin, 2003, p. 14). Language planning may also be defined as a government authorized, long term sustained and conscious effort to alter a language itself or to change a language's functions in a society for the purpose of solving communication problems (Weinstein, 1980, p. 55). Language planning has three foci: status planning, acquisition planning, and corpus planning. Status planning refers to the allocation of languages or language varieties to given functions, e.g. medium of instruction, official language, vehicle of mass communication (Cooper, 1989, p. 32). Acquisition planning refers to the efforts to influence the allocation of users or the distribution of languages/literacies by means of creating or improving opportunity or incentive to learn them or both; and corpus planning refers to the efforts related to the adequacy of the form or structure of languages/literacies (Hornberger, 2006, p. 28). This paper depicts the status and acquisition planning of the English language in Indonesia; besides, the paper presents some Indonesian government's policies concerning the status and acquisition planning of the language. Regarding the status planning, English is the primary foreign language in Indonesia with several functions, such as a language for global communication and a source to develop the Indonesian language. Regarding the acquisition planning, English is a compulsory subject in secondary and tertiary education; however, there are still some problems at the implementation level as most of the graduates have an unsatisfactory level of English proficiency.

Keywords: status planning, acquisition planning, EFL, compulsory subject

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the languages widely spoken in the world. According to Graddol(1997, p. 10), there are three levels of English-speakers: (a) the first-language speakers to the number of 320-380 million, (b) the second-language speakers to the number of 150-300 million, and (c) the foreign-language speakers to the number of 1 billion. Besides, English is used as the language of government in 74 states (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. 300). Therefore, Tonkin (2003, p. 16) assumes that the only people who think that one can conduct all of one's affairs in this world through the medium of a single language are speakers of English. They feel as they do because of the notable spread of the English language in modern times to almost all corners of the globe and almost all domains of human endeavor. English is also the world's most studied language: there are hundreds of millions of people across the world who are studying or have studied the language. The estimated gross language product (GLP—the money generated by language-related commerce) of English is US\$7,815 billion, compared to \$2,455 billion for German and \$1,789 billion for Spanish (*The Observer*, 18 March 2001). English is the most internationalized in distribution of any language in the world.

In Indonesia during the Dutch colonization, English was the language of commerce and one of the compulsory subjects in secondary education (Nasution, 1995). After the Indonesian

independence, in 1955 Frits Wachendroff, the First Chief of Center Inspectorate, announced that English was the first foreign language in Indonesia (Kartono, 1975). Since then, English has had the status of foreign language and it will not become the second official language of government in Indonesia (Sadtono, 1997). The Indonesia's official language is the Indonesian language. Determining the standing of a language in a community refers to status planning which is part of language planning.

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According to Cooper (1989), there are three primary categories of corpus planning: graphization, standardization, and modernization. Graphization refers to the provision of a writing system for a hitherto unwritten language; standardization refers to the development of a literacy norm which overrides regional and social literacies; and modernization refers to the lexical and stylistic development of a language/literacy for its expansion into hitherto unused domains (Hornberger, 2006, p. 30). Since English is a foreign language in Indonesia and English has been considered as a standardized language, it is irrelevant to discuss the corpus planning of English in Indonesia. Therefore, this paper depicts only the status planning and acquisition planning of the language in Indonesia. Besides, this paper presents some Indonesian government's policies concerning the status and acquisition planning of the language.

Status Planning of English

Status planning refers to deliberate efforts to influence the allocation of functions among a community's languages (Cooper, 1989, p. 99). Status planning seeks to alter the standing of a language (Tonkin, 2003, p. 14). Stewart (1968) provides a list of language functions as targets of status planning: official language, provincial language, national language, international language, capital language, ethnic/group language, educational language, school subject, literary language, and religious language. The Indonesian Center for Language Building and Development (*Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa*), however, differentiates language status from language function. Language status refers to the relative status of language as a system of cultural value symbols formulated on the basis of social values related to the language; language function refers to the role of language in the community of language users (Alwi & Sugono, 2000, p. 219). Since 1955 after the Indonesian independence, English has been a foreign language in Indonesia. The status of English as a foreign language has not, however, been officially stated by a decree although the 1993 State Policy Guidelines (*Garis-Garis Besar Haluan Negara*) explicitly asks for

the improvement of foreign language mastery to meet the needs of globalization. The Indonesian Language Congress VII/1998 in Jakarta also stresses the prominence of English as a foreign language, and considers that the skills of English cannot be separated from the development of human resources in facing the globalization era. English as a foreign language indicates the use of English in a non-English-speaking region. According to Alwi & Sugono (2000, p. 218), foreign languages refer to all the languages used in Indonesia, apart from the Indonesian language, vernacular languages, and the Malayan language family. In terms of the intensity of use, there are three kinds of foreign languages in Indonesia: (a) English as the primary foreign language which affects all aspects of life, (b) Arabic as the language of Islamic religion and culture since more than 90% of the Indonesian people are Moslems, and (c) Japanese, German, French, Chinese, etc. which influence certain aspects of life, such as commerce and communication.

As the primary foreign language, English has the following functions in Indonesia (Alwi & Sugono, 2000, p. 221):

- (1) English is a language for wider communication (among nations) in all aspects of life. The decision to choose English to become the language for wider communication is based on the following reasons (Huda, 2000, p. 68): (a) English has a very good internal linguistic weight, (b) there is a large number of speakers of English as the first, second and foreign language, (c) English has the widest geographic distribution, (d) English is widely used in the fields of science, technology, culture, and politics, (e) English-speaking countries dominate in the world's economy, politics, and culture. For the Indonesian people, English mastery would facilitate and improve the communication with other countries.
- (2) English is a tool for making use of science and technology development to accelerate the national development. Globalization has triggered competition among nations, and those dominating in science and technology development would win the competition. Since most of the scientific books are written in English, Indonesian people who know English could absorb, transfer, make use of, and distribute science and technology progress to improve the quality of the nation. English mastery will subsequently improve the quality of human resources. English competence, once attained, becomes a highly effective tool of intellectual discourse and learning of the world's knowledge (Gonzales, 2003).
- (3) English is used as a source to develop the Indonesian language. English is an international language spoken by many people in the world because it is, among others, a standardized language. A standardized language is "a language which has a single, widely accepted norm which is felt to be appropriate with only minor modifications or variations for all purposes for which language is used" (Ferguson, 1962 in Cooper, 1989, p. 134). English will help develop Indonesian to become a standardized and modern language in terms of not only lexis but also grammar.
- (4) Soenardji from State University of Semarang in *Seminar Politik Bahasa 1999* (Alwi & Sugono, 2000) proposes English to be used as a tool for "developing the local and national cultural practices and performances to the world level" (p. 77). By mastering English, Indonesian people can make their local and national cultures known to other countries.

Considering the important roles English plays in Indonesia, some people suggest changing the status of English to become an official foreign language or even a 'secondary language'. Asim Gunarwan from University of Indonesia in *Seminar Politik*



Bahasa1999(Alwi&Sugono, 2000, p. 76) differentiates ‘second language’ from ‘secondary language’. Second language is a psychological term referring to language acquisition/learning, while secondary language refers to language use. However, English will never become the national language because Indonesia has the Indonesia language which holds up a symbol of national pride and identity. Thus, symbolism takes priority over use in this case.

Acquisition Planning of English

Acquisition planning is “directed toward language spread to increase the number of language users — speakers, writers, listeners, or readers” (Cooper, 1989, p. 33). One way to achieve this goal is through language teaching. The Department of National Education stresses that the mastery of English can be acquired through various programs, but the program of English teaching at schools seems to be the main facility for Indonesian students (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2001). In Indonesia, the department in charge of teaching or education is the Ministry of Education and Culture (formerly the Department of National Education). The following are some of the English language acquisition policies in primary, secondary, and tertiary education

In primary education, on the basis of the Decree of the Ministry of Education and Culture No. 060/U/1993, since 1994 English has been taught as a local-content subject starting from the 4th grade of elementary-school. Local-content subjects are complementary subjects chosen by schools in accordance with the local needs and conditions. Local-content subjects may include local/native languages, local handicrafts or industries, agriculture, land or coastal fisheries, foreign languages, computer studies, etc. In 2007 the Ministry of National Education indicated that English as a local-content subject might be taught from the first-grade to the sixth-grade of elementary school. The Regulation of the Ministry of National Education No 23/2006 specified the standard competencies of elementary-school pupils who learn English, which include the four language skills. On the basis of the Government Regulation No. 34/2013 dated on 7th May 2013 regarding the change in the Government Regulation No. 19/2005 on national education standards, the Minister of Education and Culture issued some decrees concerning the basic frameworks and structures of the school curricula. The Decree No. 67/2013 on the elementary-school curriculum stipulates that English is an optional extracurricular subject.

In secondary education, on the basis of the Decree of the Ministry of Education and Culture No. 096/1967, since 1968 English has been taught as a compulsory subject in junior and senior high schools. As stated in the decree on the functions and objectives of English language teaching at secondary schools under the Ministry of Education and Culture (in Halim, 1976), the objective of teaching English at secondary schools is to equip the students with a working knowledge of English which includes reading, listening, writing, and speaking abilities. The term ‘teaching English as a foreign language’ (TEFL) is used in this context. Typically, English as a foreign language is learned either to pass exams as a necessary part of one's education, or for career progression while working for an organization or business with an international focus. The Decree of the Ministry of National Education No 153/U/2003 specifies the standard competencies of high-school students who learn English, which also include the four language skills. The Decree of the Ministry of Education and Culture No. 68/2013 on the junior-high-school curriculum determines that English is still a compulsory subject with 4 teaching hours per week; and the Decree No. 69/2013 on the senior-high-school curriculum states that English is a compulsory subject with 2 teaching hours per week.

In tertiary education, English is taught as one of the ‘required basic subjects’ (*Mata Kuliah Dasar Umum*). The required basic subject of English is intended to provide the students with the English competence (especially academic reading and writing skills) to survive in the academic life. Considering the importance of English in tertiary education that most textbooks, journals, and other sources of learning are written in English, the government has issued the Governmental Regulation No. 57/1998 which allows the use of foreign languages as media of instruction in higher education. This decision is then reinforced by the Governmental Regulation No. 60/1999 on higher education. Later, the Decree of the Ministry of Education and Culture No. 223/U/1998 regulates the cooperation of national and foreign universities to use English as the medium of instruction.

Furthermore, Paragraph 1 Article 7 of the Decree of the Ministry of National Education No. 232/U/2000 on the guideline for tertiary education curriculum and students’ learning assessment states that the curriculum for tertiary education which becomes the basis for the organization of a study program consists of a core curriculum and an institutional curriculum. Paragraph 2 Article 10 of the decree further states that institutional subjects could include Indonesian, English, Basic Social Sciences, Basic Cultural Sciences, Basic Natural Sciences, Philosophy of Science, Physical Education, etc. Besides, Paragraph 2 Article 37 of the National Education Law No. 20/2003 states that the curriculum of tertiary education should include religious education, civics education, and languages. Languages in this case include the Indonesian language, local languages, and foreign languages, especially English, as English is an international language used in global communication. Furthermore, Paragraph 2 Article 9 of the Government Regulation No. 19/2005 on national standards of education states that the curriculum in higher education for undergraduate students should include such subjects as religious education, civics education, Indonesian, and English. Therefore, English is one of the subjects taught in tertiary education.

DISCUSSION

There have been many English language acquisition policies made by the government; however, the results at the implementation level are not satisfactory. Many people still question the students’ English competence. English has become a burden for elementary-school pupils, and high-school graduates cannot use English as required by the curricula (Drost, 2005). Abdul-Hamied (1993) conducted a national research on English language teaching in senior high schools, and he found out that the results of the national examination of English were discouraging: 66.7% of the students had the scores below 6.0. Besides, there has been some controversy over the implementation of national examination of English for elementary and high-school students. Petrus (2008) discusses the validity of the national test. The validity includes *a priori* validity before the test event and *a posteriori* validity after the test event. At the university level, there are also complaints from students and lecturers. Students think that English is boring; and lecturers express their concern about students’ reading and writing skills. Alwasilah (2004, p. 102) mentions eleven characteristics of the ‘required basic subject’ of English: (a) it has been part of the system for a long time, (b) it is a compulsory subject, (c) it weighs 2 credits, (d) it is taught in the first or second semester, (e) the class is relatively large and heterogeneous, (f) it is taught by junior lecturers, (g) it is not a prestigious subject for students, (h) there is no inter- and intra-institutional coordination, (i) the class lacks facilities, (j) the material is the same as that of high schools, and (k) there is no

placement test or classification in terms of students' competence and needs. Petrus (2012) also discovers similar findings on the English course in tertiary education: (a) no needs analysis is conducted prior to designing the course, (b) since no needs analysis is conducted, no collaboration is among the stakeholders in designing the course, (c) the classes are relatively big with theatre-seating, (d) the course reviews what has been taught in high schools, and (e) no course evaluation is conducted to seek the effectiveness, efficiency, and acceptability of the course.

Considering the problems above, there should be some improvement in English language teaching and learning at all levels of education. It is necessary to make some changes in the English curricula. Wells (1987) mentions four levels of literacy: performative, functional, informational and epistemic, which respectively refer to (1) the ability to read and write, (2) the ability to use the language in everyday communication, (3) the ability to access knowledge, and (4) the ability to transform knowledge. To avoid an excessive burden on the English curricula and to make the literacy development parallel to the cognitive development of learners, some educational experts suggest that the development of literacy levels be parallel to the education levels. Alwasilah (2006) proposes that the four levels of literacy are taught in stages in accordance with the levels of education: the first level of literacy is taught to elementary-school pupils, the second level to junior-high-school students, the third level to senior-high-school students, and the fourth level to university students. Ultimately, university students should be able to write various genres of writing well.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, English has the status of primary foreign language in Indonesia. Nowadays in this ever-changing world, English has become the language of social advancement (Gonzales, 2003) for the Indonesian people. The Indonesian government has produced some policies concerning the acquisition planning of the language; however, there are some problems at the implementation level. People still question the teaching and learning of English at all levels of education because the results are unsatisfactory. Therefore, the government needs to improve and even redefine English education in accordance with the status and functions of the language in Indonesia.

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