

# Chapter 1.4

## ELT in the Indonesian School System

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### Policy

In Indonesia English is the most important compulsory foreign language subject taught at the secondary level. There are at least 16 million students formally learning English at school. This involves at least 75,000 English teachers in about 50,000 state and private schools, spread out across a system of more than 390,000 schools in 412 districts and more than 90 cities.

Education in Indonesian schools is run by two ministries, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Schools fall into two categories, state and private schools. At the secondary level private schools far outnumber state schools. Private schools are also in two categories, those for the middle and upper social sector and those for less fortunate children who are not accepted in state schools. All schools use the same national curriculum. Private schools with higher tuition usually offer valued-added opportunities, included (among many others) is the amount of hours devoted to English lessons.

The curriculum has gone through a variety of changes in approach and terminology over the past decade. Prior to 2004 it was called a Competency Based Curriculum. That year it was replaced by a Genre Based Approach. In 2006 and 2013 the government made further changes that are now referred to as the Curriculum 2006 and Curriculum 2013. At the secondary level the approach for English remains the same. The main objective in lower secondary levels is to master functional literacy, which includes five types of texts and in upper secondary levels the aim is informational literacy through eight kinds of texts.

In line with the change of national curriculum in 2013, the government made a significant change in the policy of instructional material production. In the previous curricula, textbooks were not directly regulated by the government, while in the new curriculum textbooks are produced centrally by the government. English textbooks are written by a number of teachers supervised by English Language Teaching (ELT) experts.

English teachers in Indonesia should undergo pre-service training at the undergraduate level in any universities that have an English education department. The graduates either apply to become civil servant teachers under the government system or to teach in private schools and English courses of study. Recruitment into the state school system is not commonly preceded by special training or an entry test to measure the teachers' competence. It is only in wealthy private schools and English study courses that candidate teachers are selectively recruited.

## Challenges in Practice

The government, students, and teachers face a number of challenges. On one side the government needs to encourage the development of ELT to prepare young people for global change, and on the other side it needs to address certain situations and policies to achieve this goal. The number and quality of teachers, English curriculum at schools, and instructional materials are among some additional challenges that should be highlighted.

### Teacher Supply and Quality

It is not easy for the government to supply English teachers to all schools in Indonesia, especially because of the number of universities that provide English education has not been sufficient. Nation-wide there are 128 ELT pre-service training programs at universities, with various different accreditation standings. About 23 percent are at state universities and 77 percent at private universities. A and B accreditation levels are considered as having robust potential to produce better English teachers. However, we still have close to 30 percent of these tertiary programs in ELT that do not meet this standard to produce competent teachers.

Before the era of decentralized government in 2004, teacher recruitment was done by the central government. Despite recruitment of 1 million applicants competing for 64,000 positions as civil service teachers, the competency level was shown to be low. The level of achievement of candidate English teachers is still unsatisfactory, at only 58 percent (Hamied 2013).

Another measure of the lack of quality of English teachers is shown on the result of the TOEIC Test given to hundreds of the practicing English teachers. In 2007, for example, out of 13,102 teachers more than 50 percent were categorized as within the novice level, and only 15 percent tested at intermediate or higher levels. Only about 4 percent of the total test takers demonstrated a basic working proficiency level or above and could be considered potentially effective teachers. In 2013 the same test was given to 907 teachers from ten different regions. The result showed that only about 9 percent are at the appropriate English proficiency level to teach, and the largest group of these is at the elementary level (Research and Development Service and Assessment Department International Test Center 2013).

At the moment the focus of the government is still on the quantity of teachers rather than on quality. The practice of English teacher education, not just in Indonesia but also in many other developing countries, has only developed to fulfill the need of quantity instead of quality. Cross (2003) mentioned that,

Even when there is some form of teacher preparation, there may well be little relationship between the program's nature and the real needs of future teachers (learners). In some cases, the programs were inherited from colonial masters and have largely been unchallenged.

Besides this, teachers themselves are trapped in the systems that often disadvantage them. The fact that there has not been a recruitment system, which classifies the level of teachers' competence, creates inequality. Teachers who start with higher qualifications are put together with those who are less capable, and they are treated the same ways. As a consequence, in-service trainings are often carried out based on assumptions from the government rather than to meet the actual needs of teachers.

In this case the government should prioritize mapping the competencies of English teachers to find out their levels of English as well as their teaching skills. The data then can be used to determine in-service training needed by teachers to fulfill the needs of the students. At some point the government also needs to determine the quality of the teacher trainers who are in charge of providing in-service teacher training.

## Implementation of New Curriculum

The implementation of the 2013 national curriculum has created some controversies in part because it was introduced too quickly without sufficient time for understanding the concepts, curriculum content, and how training would be managed for teachers. Beyond this, insufficient time was allocated for the training of trainers and teachers, and the opportunities for teachers were unevenly distributed, especially in remote areas. During our conversations, many teachers reported that these problems have now created considerable confusion, especially among teachers who are on the front lines of curriculum implementation. The main cause of the confusion is most likely that teachers have not been equipped with sufficient training and resources.

Bearing in mind that in Indonesia there are more than 390,000 schools spread out in 412 districts and more than 90 cities, to change the curriculum from a school-based one to a centralized, national one demands careful study and preparation. In the previous curriculum every single school was given the freedom to develop its own curriculum based on national guidelines. In contrast, the new curriculum ("Curriculum 2013") has been developed at the national level. This includes the syllabus and textbooks to be used in all schools all over the country.

The new curriculum reduced the amount of time allocated for English language instruction in grades 10 to 12 at the secondary level to only 90 minutes a week. This reduction surely disadvantages the students. To face the demands and opportunities of the ASEAN Economic Community, students should have been equipped with more English lessons that they can use in their life after school. If the main and stated reason to change curriculum is to prepare the young people to participate in a globalizing world, there is no doubt that the amount of English instruction should be sufficient to achieve that.

As mentioned earlier, students from higher socio-economic standing will not have to worry about this change, because they can have more opportunities to master English either in private schools or through different channels other than at school. They may have access to unlimited Internet resources, or they may join

extra English classes at commercial English schools, in addition to many more possibilities.

Sooner or later the inequality of opportunity to learn and master English among young people will surely create a wider gap between those from families with better economic backgrounds and those who have limited access. Especially because English is the working language for the ASEAN Economic Community, the number of young people who are ready to join the job market will be fewer.

The new government of President Joko Widodo, who was just inaugurated in October this year, has moved swiftly to suspend Curriculum 2013 in schools that had not already implemented it for three semesters. This covers the vast majority of schools, who will return to using the previous curriculum and once again offer more hours of English at the secondary school level. The shift demonstrates that the new Minister of Primary and Secondary Education, Anies Baswedan, is serious about preparing young people to join the global job market through having more hours in English lessons at school. This needs to be coupled with providing more training for the teachers to help them raise their level of performance. The curriculum also should be developed in a more teacher-friendly manner that can help teachers to deliver their English lessons more effectively.

## Instructional Materials

The rollback of Curriculum 2013 presumably will also correct another big challenge that has accompanied this policy: production of textbooks by the central government to complement the curriculum. Apart from logistical problems, the government should have been aware of the challenges of producing one type of textbook that can fulfill the need of students in more than 500 districts and cities.

The government should be aware that in reality education in Indonesia cannot be designed as “one size fits all.” The differences between the contexts in so many different regions make it hard to achieve high quality education outcomes if everyone is working towards the same standards. Kennedy explained:

. . . too much centralized control impedes the implementation of change and innovation, and stifles the development and creativity among teachers and learners which governments need to encourage if they genuinely wish to produce the thinkers and learners needed for their future societies. (Kennedy 1996, 78)

It ought not to be the case there are schools whose teachers have not been trained to use the new curriculum and which have not yet received textbooks. But unfortunately this is actually the case. Therefore, urgent action should be taken by local governments—not only central government—to avoid further problems that are likely to disadvantage the children.

## What's Next

ELT in Indonesia should be more seriously developed to help the young people participate in the global world. Especially those who have limited access to better social and economic life should be provided with more opportunities to learn English at schools.

The first important action to be carried out is to design a master trainer-training program. Master trainers should have a thorough understanding of the context where they are supposed to do their training work. They must master all the documents and the philosophy behind them. The master trainers also need to have the skill of modeling lessons. To assign lecturers from universities who have limited practical experience in schools and training may cause failure because the training remains focused more on theory than good pedagogical practice.

Videos showing how teachers should carry out lessons may help teachers to conduct their classes in the ways expected by the curriculum. It is also useful to develop teachers' reflective skills, which enable them to be more self-conscious and alert to the quality of their own teaching.

If the government requires textbooks to be of a national standard, they may select some accredited commercial publishers to produce the books and monitor their work through the Center for Curriculum and Textbook Development in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.

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