

Developing Standards for EFL in Indonesia as Part of the EFL Teaching Reform

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Abstract: The teaching of English in Indonesia has so far been unable to reach its declared goal, which is the students' mastery of the English macro skills listening, speaking, reading, writing. Various factors have certainly contributed to this failure, but the highly centralized curriculum has been one of the many to be blamed for it. The new system of regional autonomy gives ample opportunity to schools/ regions to develop their own curricula. This will lead to the need for the establishment of standard of English to ensure the achievement of the ultimate goal of teaching English throughout the country. This paper suggests that the development of standards for English should involve as many parties concerned as possible, including EFL teachers, EFL teacher educators, and users of school graduates. Another suggestion made related to the aspects to be covered in the standards, namely (1) the qualification of EFL policy makers, EFL teacher educators, and EFL teachers; (2) class size, (3) facilities and equipment, and (4) assessment and evaluation.

Key words: development, standard, EFL teaching reform

One can hardly deny that English plays a very important role in the major aspects of life in this globalized era. It is the most widely spoken language in the world, with more than 300 million speaking it as the first language, more than 200 million people speaking it as a second language, and more than one billion people speaking it as a foreign language (Crystal, 1997). It is, therefore, ready to assume its role as the global language. Its influence is increasing with the advancement of information technology, which has evidently accelerated the explosion of knowledge, increased the speed of communication for various purposes, and gradually created a global culture. A claim that this global language will contribute a great deal to one's success in this information era is then not an exaggeration.

In the Indonesian context, a good mastery of English will indeed help accelerate the development of the country for two major reasons. First, the development should be supported by the mastery of science and technology. To the writer's observation, most of the books of science and technology are written in English and much scientific information available on electronic media is also presented in English. Second, English is one of the international languages used for various international communication purposes trading, diplomacy, politics and education. So a good mastery of English can be said to be a prerequisite for the success of developing this country.

Unfortunately, the teaching of English in Indonesia has so far been unable to achieve its declared goals despite the many efforts made to improve its quality. A layman's observation has indicated that secondary school leavers who have learned this language for 6 years, with almost 900 hours of school teaching, are unable to use this language for communication purposes. This phenomenon can also be observed among university graduates and even among faculty members.

This situation should be improved in the context of decentralization in which the

probability of success might be greater due to greater freedom to meet the students' needs. Under the school-based management, the teaching of English can be designed in such a way as to meet the learning needs of the students. However, to ensure that the school helps its students to learn English to reach a level of performance publicly recognized, a 'standard' for English should be formulated. The standard should be the main reference for benchmarking.

This paper focuses on the discussion of the formulation of standards for English for Indonesian secondary schools.

THE TEACHING OF EFL IN INDONESIA: LEARNING FROM THE PAST AND LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FUTURE

Learning from the Past

A lot of efforts have been made to improve the quality of EFL teaching in Indonesia. A new policy was made in 1994 to allow primary schools to teach English to their fourth, fifth and sixth graders. The syllabi were revised four times in line with the revision of the school curricula so that there were four syllabus documents, i.e. the 1968, the 1975, the 1984 and 1994 versions. In addition, a supplement to the 1994 syllabus was made in 1999 in response to the teachers' demand for easy reference and the global demand for communicative skills.

To support the success of the TEFLIN development and improvement, other related programs were carried out. In-service EFL teacher education programs were offered to teachers of junior and senior secondary schools. The Universitas Terbuka (Open University) and other LPTKs (teacher education institutions) offered continuing education programs to EFL teachers. In-service and continuing education programs for EFL faculty members were also carried out. The former was through the P3G (in-service teacher education programs) and other forms of in-service training programs and the latter through postgraduate programs either in the country or abroad. New textbooks were also written and more equipment was provided. All of this was made possible by foreign loans.

These educational efforts have to some extent been fruitful. A great number of EFL teachers have learned new approaches to EFL teaching and learning, and quite a number have got postgraduate degrees. Some change has also occurred in the EFL teaching practices, i.e. moving away a little step from language focused practices to more communication-focused practices.

However, observation has indicated that what has been achieved in TEFLIN so far has not significantly been reflected in the results of EFL teaching. Many people complain that EFL teaching at school has failed to develop the students' English communicative skills. In the global context in which international competition is very strong, the EFL teaching situation is a very disappointing and even frustrating one. Although one's command of English alone is certainly not sufficient since he/she still needs to have expertise, it is indeed an indispensable requirement for going international. Besides, it also a vital tool for absorbing science and technology of which the role in this country's development is unquestionable. Therefore, it stands to reason to assume that the failure of EFL teaching might to some extent have contributed to the low rank of Indonesian competitiveness and higher education. Data presented by the Asia Week (30 June 2000) indicated that only four Indonesian universities could be

categorized as good in Asia-Australia, but ranked 61st (University of Indonesia), 68th (Gadjah Mada University), 73rd (Diponegoro University), and 75th (Airlangga University) respectively among the 77 universities being surveyed. Since the first two have been considered as the best universities in Indonesia, the data were quite shocking. Still another piece of unpleasant news struck Indonesian people. That is, Indonesian competitiveness ranks 37th as reported in Global Competitiveness Report 1999 published by the World Economic Forum, Sweden. The above data have certainly caused teachers, teacher educators and educational scientists alike in Indonesia to realize how poor the quality of Indonesia's education in general, including that of EFL teaching. In the context of this paper, it can be said that the EFL teaching in Indonesia has so far failed to achieved its declared aims.

So, what has been wrong to the whole business of education in Indonesia, particularly that of EFL teaching? The first to blame has been the adoption of a centralized system of education, which is mainly characterized by uniformity. This is certainly in contradiction to the diversity characterizing Indonesia. The shift from the centralized system to the decentralized one as has been legally mandated by Law No. 22, 1999, is therefore worth appreciating.

The decentralized system, partly implemented through school-based management, is quite promising if followed by appropriate policies, in this context, of EFL teaching. Looking Ahead to the Future

To ensure true improvement of education in general and of EFL teaching in particular, the decentralized system should be translated into appropriate policies, with diversity being the first for consideration--diversity in cultural, linguistic, and natural environmental background. In addition to such diversity, differences in students' needs and capability as well as educational aspiration should be the next for consideration. All of this, however, should be within the framework of national unity.

With the global challenge facing us today, we have to think and work very hard and responsibly in seeking for the fundamental solution to the problems of EFL teaching and learning. Since people are the greatest and most valuable asset for any country, the development of education, which means the development of human beings, should receive the greatest attention. This is because once the educational development is successful in the true sense, the Indonesian people will be quite ready to solve their own individual, local and national problems and improve their standards of living, while at the same time contribute to the solution of world problems. Considering the data on Indonesia's competitiveness and higher education quality cited above and the challenges posed by the global era, it is indeed high time for us to carry out EFL teaching reform in line with the educational reform now being formulated through the Educational Bill by Commission VI of the Parliament, supported by Komite Reformasi Pendidikan or the Educational Reform Committee.

The reform is indeed in the direction of answering the question concerned with the characteristics of the coming era and possible problems to be encountered. The technological society has been identified as having the following 6 characteristics as cited by Lange (1990) from Mulkeen and Tetenbaum (1987) Tetenbaum and Mulkeen (1986) as follows: (1) The twenty-first century will be knowledge-based; (2) The twenty-first century will see an increased information flow; (3) The twenty-first century will see rapid change and impermanence; (4) The twenty-first century will see an increase in decentralization of organization, institutions, and systems; (5) The twenty-first century will be people-oriented; (6) The twenty-first century will see major

demographic shifts. The implications of these characteristics, according to Lange (1990) are concerned with recruitment of prospective teachers, the shift from the teacher-centred to the learner-centred approach, lifelong learning, autonomous learners, autonomous teachers, the needs for minority students.

In the context of this paper, we have to give special attention to application of the learner-centred approach to EFL teaching. With this approach, the individual learning needs of the students should receive much more attention than ever before; thus more freedom for the teachers to respond to the students' learning needs. With this freedom, teachers will have ample opportunity to be creative. Creativity will meet the demand of diversity. To ensure that the teaching and learning of English is directed towards a certain goal benefiting the students, it is necessary to have standards for which all parties will strive.

THE EFL STANDARD

As has been mentioned before, unity is our greatest strength and given the present political situation and condition an urgent measure to strengthen it need to be taken. It should be kept in mind, however, that unity is by no means identical with uniformity. To develop a strong personality with high integrity within individual citizens within the framework of national unity, the educational system should be developed in such a way that it enables children to develop to become total persons with their own unique characteristics. For this purpose, EFL standards as part of educational standards should be formulated, but the ways to reach the standards should be left with the teachers and other related parties concerned. Regarding the diversity and existing disparities in development, the national standards should simultaneously give hope and challenge the students. In this way, every one will have opportunity to learn in the true sense. In other words, the minimum standard should be diversified but each group's standard should be improved with different its development.

What is Meant by Standard?

The term standards (plural) implies a passion for excellence and habitual attention to quality. High standards, be in people or institutions, are revealed through reliability', integrity, self-discipline, passion, and craftsmanship (Wiggins, 1995). Persons or institutions with high standards are those who live by a set of mature, coherent, and consistently applied values evident in all their actions. Higher standards, Wiggins reminds us, are not stiffer test results quotas but a more vigorous commitment to intellectual values upheld consistently and daily in the face of entropy, fatalism, and the occasional desire on everyone's part to not give a damn (op cit.:189). When used in the singular to describe human accomplishment, a "standard" means an exemplary performance serving as a benchmark. So there is a difference between 'standard' and 'standards'. For purposes of our discussion, both meaning will be referred to.

Who Develops the Standard(s)?

Who decides the EFL standard(s)? It depends on many factors, of which one is the quality of the related people. In America, a survey was conducted to find out what the public and teachers think about the national standards. The result showed that 81% of the public and 65% of the teachers believed that America needs the national standards (Ravitch, 1995). The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) has led the way in demonstrating the power of national standards as a lever for educational reform. Developed by teachers in several years, the national standards in mathematics have

created a coherent plan for mathematics education from kindergarten through the twelfth grade, and in more than 40 states have become the basis for changing mathematics education, resulting in emphasis moving away from reliance on rote memorization and repetition to an emphasis on solving problems, applying mathematics to practical situations, and using hands-on approaches to learning. In other subject areas, the national standards were developed by an independent, non-governmental organizations supported by the Department of Education.

What about in Indonesia? Being underpaid, Indonesian EFL teachers hardly have time to think about setting the standards in EFL on their own initiatives since many of them have to find additional work to get more money to support their families. In principle, however, the development of the standards in EFL should involve as many parties concerned with education as possible, including EFL teachers, EFL teacher educators, and the users of the school graduates. The last mentioned party is consistent with the concept of the Total Quality Management, in which the clients have the biggest say about the quality (see Sallis, 1993; Sudarsono & Ruwiyanto, 1999). In this connection, it seems that TEFLIN should lead the team.

What Aspects to Be Covered in the Standard(s) in EFL?

Referring to the first meaning, standards can be reached if EFL policy makers, teacher educators, and teachers are all of high quality—understanding of the nature of EFL teaching and learning, its technical know-how, and interactive and human skills. Therefore, the minimum qualification of these people should be formulated. For consideration, the minimum qualification should be a first degree in EFL education.

The next standard to be formulated is concerned with class size. The formulator should refer to results of studies about effective EFL class size. The first consideration should be focused on providing the students with as ample opportunity as possible to practise using EFL to ensure the development of their communicative skills. For consideration, the class size likely to meet this requirement is around 20.

To ensure the success of EFL teaching and learning in the true sense, adequate teaching and learning materials and facilities should be provided. Again a standard in this area should be formulated. With varying degrees of sophistication, the minimum standard to be considered is the provision of quality textbooks, a collection of authentic materials enough for every student, dictionaries and reference books available in the library both for students and teachers, and equipment necessary for executing listening programs.

The 1994 secondary school EFL syllabi have in fact been macro skill-oriented. The final assessment system, however, has created a test-orientated teaching-learning situation. This is not conducive to learning to communicate in the target language throughout the country. This situation certainly has disadvantaged those in unfavourable teaching and learning situations and conditions. Therefore, a diversified standard should be formulated in the macro-skill areas. The important thing to remember is that the standard should both give hope and challenge to students in striving for the better achievement.

To ensure the achievement of an EFL communicative skills standard according to the characteristics of different groups of students, there must be a change of assessment policy. It seems that the standardized testing applied to everyone at the same time throughout the country is not empowering anyone. Instead, its wash-back effect upon the teaching and learning practices has been too strong. Therefore, assessment should

be decentralized. Besides, the assessment system should ensure that all the macro-skills are given equal attention, as has been required by the 1999 Supplementary Syllabi. For consideration, the receptive skills of listening and reading should be mass- tested, though not necessarily nation-wide, and the productive skills of speaking and writing should be authentically assessed and also locally tested in the final year. The final grade should be determined by using a certain formula. For consideration, equal percentage should be given to the four macro skills.

The last aspect is concerned with EFL teacher education. Since the EFL teaching and learning should focus on the development of communicative skills, the EFL teacher education program should be directed towards helping the EFL student teachers to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills as well as attitude. In other words, the program should focus on (1) the development of EFL communicative competence and skills of executing this competence, (2) the development of communicative EFL teaching competence and skills in executing this competence, and (3) the development of positive attitudes towards professional development. This is the standard to be considered and this requires that the existing EFL teacher education curriculum be redesigned.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

If it is conducted successfully, EFL teaching might contribute to the acceleration of Indonesia's development. It has so far been unable to reach its declared goals due to unfavourable situations and conditions. In the decentralization context, however, a new hope has arisen. It is now left with all parties concerned whether to seize this good opportunity to make improvement. One thing which seems to be certain is that success is a great possibility if all aspects of EFL teaching and learning meet the necessary standard and it is high time for TEFLIN to contribute significantly to the improvement of this situation.

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