

LANGUAGE DILEMMAS IN THE EFL CLASS: HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL FACTORS

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Abstract

This research explains the complex and many-sided landscape of English language teaching (ELT) and how historical and political contexts influence it. By acknowledging the deep roots of ELT, this research highlights the importance of understanding the challenges and opportunities faced in teaching and learning English in various contexts. The authors conducted extensive library research to gather data and insights into the complexities of language learning in the EFL context, providing valuable solutions for addressing these challenges. Moreover, the article offers a historical review of the Dutch occupation of Indonesia and how it impacted education and English language teaching in the region. By exploring the historical context, the article highlights the significance of acknowledging the past and its influence on present-day ELT practices.

Keywords: *EFL, language dilemmas, historical review, political factor*

INTRODUCTION

In the past, second language teaching and learning was primarily focused on individual psychological processes, and the L2 classroom was commonly viewed as an isolated environment where individual learners gathered to communicate. Little attention was paid to the broader social and political contexts of learning (Johnston, 2003). Scholars and policymakers have discussed innovative teaching methods to prevent early school leaving and prepare future adults for adverse social contexts (Ainley, 2011). However, in recent decades, the field has come to recognize the significance of political and historical contexts in English language teaching, as well as their potential impact on classroom practices. As a result, there has been greater emphasis on understanding the possible implications of the spread of English and ELT worldwide for individuals and communities. This includes examining language policies, power dynamics, and cultural influences shaping language teaching and learning. It is essential to comprehend the

phenomenon of learning regulation, which includes specific mental models of learning, learning orientations, cognitive processing, and metacognitive regulation strategies (Vermunt, 1996). By taking a more comprehensive approach to language education, the field is better equipped to address the complex and multifaceted nature of language learning in today's globalized world. It is important to remember that the terms "political" and "historical" create some difficulties, even though some language teachers may not identify as political and may not see the language classroom as a forum for discussing political matters. In their profession, ELT professionals are not independent beings. Many variables, including expectations, laws, institutional standards, and the availability of resources and societal goals, have an impact on them. As they navigate and carry out their responsibilities, it is critical to understand how these variables affect how they do their job. It has underlined the connection between language classroom activities and broader social and political dynamics (Tollefson, 1995). Thus, to provide an attractive and effective learning environment, it is necessary to consider the possible effects of these influences on language instruction and learning and carefully navigate them.

English language teaching (ELT) is not just a mere pedagogical activity but rather a complex and inherently political process (Johnston, 2003). There are many different political aspects that affect how English is taught and developed, and these factors change based on the situation. These variables include the institutions' and individuals' rules and beliefs toward the process. Therefore, the goals and purposes of ELT vary depending on these factors (Kennedy, 2010). Against this backdrop, this paper sheds light on the language dilemma faced in EFL classes, specifically in Indonesia, by examining the historical and political factors that influence the teaching and learning of English in this context.

There are complex political issues to consider in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). It's remarkable to observe the limited attention that has been given to the connection between language teaching and the study of education (Stern, 1983). Similarly, Pennycook (1990) notes the peculiar isolation of second language education from educational theory. He suggests that since language serves as both the content and medium in the L2 classroom, language teaching theory has often focused inwardly, becoming excessively preoccupied with the internal aspects of language and language learning at the neglect of other concerns. Concurrently, Crookes (2003) proposes that acknowledging the wider philosophical underpinnings of applied linguistic theory will assist educators in formulating their own practical 'philosophies of teaching.

Alderson (2009), for instance, highlights that numerous institutions (and governments!) have vested interests in advocating the teaching and utilization of English. We now shift our focus to these aspects, which are explicitly political and potentially problematic, in the dissemination of English and ELT. These involve the argument over classroom management, the worldviews, and beliefs that shape various approaches to teaching languages, the choices made about what should be taught in L2 (second language) curricula, and the type of English that should be taught in a world that is changing quickly. In order to make things deeper, a critical analysis of the objectives, goals, and possible maintaining roles of language testing is also included. It is clear that ELT is more than just a technical practice; it has profound political and historical foundations essential to comprehend the potential and difficulties related to teaching and learning English in many situations.

Previous studies have examined the language dilemmas faced when teaching English in a class-

room setting (Ding et al., 2021; Selvarajan, 2023). However, no previous investigations have been carried out on language dilemmas related to historical/political factors. Therefore, the researchers conducting this study aimed to explore the language dilemmas arising from historical and political factors.

METHODS

In conducting this study, researchers chose to use library research as their primary method of data collection, drawing mainly from prior studies (Firman, 2022). The library technique involves thoroughly searching for and locating relevant materials associated with the research topic. These materials include journals, scientific articles, theses, dissertations, papers, and other published works that have already been written. The results of this study were carefully analyzed, grouped according to the study's objective and formulation of the research problem, and then used to develop and enhance their states about the historical and political influences on the linguistic problems in the EFL class. After that, the researchers' thorough analysis of the data gathered through library research allowed them to establish a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of language learning in the EFL context. It provided valuable insights into potential solutions for addressing these challenges.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Historical review

The role of education in the colonization of Indonesia by the Dutch cannot be overstated. Throughout their 350-year reign over the country, the Dutch authorities showed a strong reluctance to educate the local population. This policy contrasted with the British in their colonial territories, who actively encouraged education for the masses. As a result, most Indonesians were left uneducated, even at the primary level. The limited number of secondary schools that were accessible in the area were entirely attended to by children of Dutch ancestry, along with a small number of powerful local politicians. Due to their lack of access to the same opportunities for social status and education, the majority of people saw their current wide divide with the privileged few increase significantly. This lack of education profoundly impacted Indonesia's social, economic, and political development, and its effects can still be felt today. The education system in Indonesia faces some challenges that need to be addressed. Leadership plays a crucial role in the success or failure of the education system. Leaders who have adequate knowledge and expertise in regional autonomy can make effective decisions for the improvement of the education system. An uneven distribution of infrastructure throughout the country affects the quality of learning. The quality and quantity of educators is also a concern. In rural areas, there is a shortage of teachers, and they tend to be less qualified. Finding solutions to these problems is a collective responsibility of the country. Neglecting these issues could lead to further deterioration of the education system (Nasution, 2019).

During the colonial period, the government of the Dutch East Indies did not want to provide education to the native population. They feared that providing education to the locals would lead to resistance against the colonial government. As a result, the government rejected offers from the Netherlands and America to establish Christian missionary schools in Indonesia. Instead, the focus was on providing education primarily for Dutch children. Schools were set up in the late 19th century, and Dutch children were given better educational opportunities than in their home country. Children of Dutch descent could enter secondary education from 1860, while advanced education for Indonesian children was only provided in 1914 (Sumardi,

2023). The Indonesian people had limited access to education during the Dutch colonial period despite some schools teaching English as a foreign language. However, indigenous children had very few opportunities to attend these schools. In Indonesia, the implementation of Western-style primary schools occurred much later in 1907. It was only in 1914, when junior high schools were acknowledged, that English language instruction was introduced, according to the introduction of these schools. However, it was not until 1918 that senior high schools were established. These facts, sourced from Van der Veur & Lian (1969) and Dardjowidjojo (2003), provide a glimpse into the struggles faced by Indonesians in their quest for education during the Dutch colonial period.

Based on Tilaar's (1995) research, the literacy rate in Indonesia during the year 1930 was recorded at a relatively low figure of 6.4%. As of 1940, the number of senior high schools in the country was limited to a mere 37. The segment of the Indonesian population who enjoyed privileged status had the opportunity to get an education, which resulted in their proficiency in the Dutch language, and potentially, a limited command of English. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that English was not originally intended to serve as a means of communication, and the Dutch rulers displayed minimal inclination in offering educational opportunities to the indigenous population. The aforementioned policy exerted a significant influence on the nation's progress, since it hindered the acquisition of skills and information by the bulk of the populace.

The Indonesian population faced significant limitations in their educational opportunities during the period of World War II as a result of the Japanese government's prohibition on the acquisition of English language skills. Following the Japanese surrender, the Dutch tried to reinstate the pre-war educational curricula in Indonesia. According to Gregory (1964), the educational system experienced significant disruptions during the war and the subsequent four years of challenges. However, despite the challenging circumstances of the war, the younger generation exhibited unwavering determination and aspirations. Eventually, they recognized a favorable moment to assert their autonomy from Dutch governance on August 17, 1945, after engaging in a rapid yet violent armed confrontation necessary to thrive.

Indonesia's journey towards independence from Dutch colonial rule began on August 17, 1945. However, it was not until December 27, 1949, when the Dutch finally recognized Indonesia's sovereignty, that the country could focus on building a republic and addressing social and cultural issues, including education. The Indonesian government recognized the importance of teaching a foreign language, and in 1950, English was chosen over Dutch as the country's first foreign language due to its international status. This decision was part of a pattern of language policy choices made by newly independent states for multilingual societies., as noted by Dardjowidjojo (2003). It is worth noting that while Indonesia shares some similarities in its use of English with neighboring countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines, the country's unique history as a former Dutch colony means that it has not had the same foundation of English use in official or public life.

Since Indonesia's independence, the English language has had a major impact on the nation's culture. It has been widely embraced and applied in various aspects of society, such as politics, business, education, and the media. The reason for choosing English as the first foreign language is because it is the world's language of science and technology. Therefore, learning English is essential to keep up with the rapid development of science and technology in Indone-

sia (Dardjowidjojo, 2003). While a comprehensive sociological history of English in Indonesia would be ideal, time limits and the challenge of locating relevant sources prevent this from happening. It is important that English is now a crucial component of the Indonesian educational system. Learners must take the course, which is required in schools, and they should know the basics of the language they are studying. Completing English-language texts is a requirement for most school courses, making it unusual for students to finish their studies without fulfilling these criteria.

Furthermore, with the increasing globalization of business, English has become the preferred language of communication in many industries. Like example, business people in Indonesia find that management success ideas are often published in English, and it has become essential to have a good command of the language to stay competitive. As the global lingua franca, English is widely adopted by both native and non-native speakers as the primary mode of communication in the business world. This trend is particularly evident in multinational corporations and other international organizations where English serves as the common language for conducting business dealings and negotiations (Rao, 2019). In addition, the English language has become ubiquitous in the media landscape of Indonesia. It is common to find that the majority of printed and broadcasted materials are in English, and it is a language that is used to communicate with a wider audience. Even though it might not be possible to give a comprehensive social account of English in Indonesia, it is clear that the language has grown to be an important aspect of the country's culture and that its importance will only increase as commerce and communication become more globally interconnected.

Language dilemmas in historical/political factors

Politics and language are closely linked. Language brings people together, creating a shared sense of identity, nationality, and culture that can have a significant impact on government policies. The way that policies are developed and implemented at the state level can have a significant impact on the relationship between language and politics (May, 2013). The education system in Indonesia is heavily influenced by legislation, which involves many forms that can be quite confusing. To clarify the subject, in August 2000, the highest legislative body in the country, the People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat or MPR), consisting of 700 members, established an official hierarchy of legislation. The purpose of this hierarchy is to outline the order of importance and applicability of the various forms of legislation affecting the education system. This step holds significant importance in ensuring the effective regulation of the education system and the establishment of well-defined laws governing it. The relevant legal instruments include the 1945 Constitution, MPR Resolution, Regulation by the Government replacing a Law, Government Regulation, Presidential Decree, and Regional Regulation.

The language policy of a country is designed to cater to the diverse linguistic needs of its citizens belonging to different communities and cultural backgrounds. It takes into account the existing language resources and examines the role of language in the social and cultural life of the nation. The policy formulates effective strategies to manage and enhance language resources and coordinates with relevant planning agencies to ensure their implementation. Finally, the language policy aims to promote linguistic diversity and inclusivity while fostering social harmony and national unity (Corson, 1990). Various other legislative mechanisms are employed in addition to legislation and ministerial decrees to regulate various aspects of society. These consist of Presidential Instructions, which set forth the policies and procedures that government

agencies must adhere to; Ministerial Decrees, which offer particular rules and guidelines for a range of industries, including labor, health, and education; and Circular Letters, which government departments issue to offer guidance on the application of policies (Tabalujan, 2002). The main forms of governance in education are laws and ministerial decrees, which establish guidelines for the operations of educational institutions such as schools.

The National Education System in Indonesia was initially addressed in Law 2 of 1989, marking the first legislation specifically dedicated to education. However, Komaria (1998) points out that Law number 4 of 1950, known as RI number 4 1950, does not mention the inclusion of English language alongside Indonesian and regional languages. This 1950 Law played a crucial role in establishing the framework for subsequent legislation concerning various levels of education, including kindergarten, primary, vocational secondary, and higher education. Its effectiveness persisted until the issuance of the 1989 Law on Education. During a conference of teacher trainers in 1955, Mr. Wachendorff, the inaugural head of the Central Inspectorate of English Language Instruction in the Ministry of Education, made a statement regarding the position of English in Indonesia. He mentioned that English could never be widely used in daily life in Indonesia or even be the second official language, as cited (Dardjowidjojo, 2003). However, he emphasized that English should be given priority as the first foreign language to be learned. This statement underscores the importance of English as a foreign language in Indonesia and highlights the country's focus on ensuring that its citizens have a strong foundation in the English language.

Law number 2 of 1989 on the National Education System establishes a comprehensive framework for the education system in Indonesia. The legislation delineates the overarching objectives of education on a national scale, encompassing the holistic development of individuals in areas such as spirituality, ethical accountability, aptitude, physical and mental well-being, self-reliance, and capacity to contribute to the advancement of the nation. In legal terms, a clear distinction is made between formal education within a school setting and education that takes place outside of the traditional school environment, commonly referred to as extramural education. Compulsory education in Indonesia encompasses a six-year duration of primary schooling, referred to as Sekolah Dasar (SD), followed by an additional three years of education at the Junior High School level, known as Sekolah Lanjutan Tingkat Pertama (STLP) (Fadjar, 2003)

Furthermore, it facilitates an additional three-year duration at Senior High School, which is widely regarded as the gateway to pursuing tertiary education. Higher education can be pursued at various institutions, including polytechnics, academies, institutes, and universities. The legal framework also encompasses the broad aspects pertaining to the eligibility criteria and responsibilities of educators. It recognizes the importance of well-qualified and competent teachers by specifying the qualifications that they must possess. It also outlines the duties of teachers, which include providing a conducive learning environment (Kurniawati & Kristianti, 2022) and promoting the development of students' intellectual, emotional, and social skills. One of the most significant aspects of the law is its emphasis on the importance of textbooks. The 1989 Law gives the government an essential say in school textbooks' writing and selection process. This provision ensures that the textbooks used in schools are of high quality and meet the educational needs of students. English is now a required subject at secondary level. Additionally, foreign languages can also be taught. This provision recognizes the importance of English as a global language and the need for Indonesian students to be proficient in it. The law also acknowledges

the value of learning other foreign languages, which can open up opportunities for students to engage with the wider world.

Several legal measures emphasize the importance of English education in Indonesia. As per the provisions delineated in the 1989 Law, particularly in Chapter IX, Section 39, Verse 3, it is explicitly stipulated that English is a compulsory component of the Basic Curriculum. This claim is supported by Government Regulation Number 28, 1990, which stipulates that English language instruction must be included in the curriculum starting from the first year of Junior High School. Additionally, schools have the option to include English education as early as the fourth year of Primary School. However, it is important to acknowledge that Government Regulation Number 27, which pertains to Kindergarten Education, does not specifically encompass English as an authorized subject for instruction. The issue of determining the optimal age for commencing English instruction has engendered a scholarly discourse within the field of education (Fadjar, 2003).

Nevertheless, English is currently being widely taught in various forms at the primary school level. According to Section 42, Verse 2 of Chapter XI of the 1989 Law on Education, the utilization of English as a medium of instruction is permissible under certain circumstances, specifically when it is deemed essential for the acquisition of knowledge in a specific academic discipline or vocational expertise. Improving students' reading skills has been the main goal of English education in Indonesia in order to facilitate their access to resources and information. But mandatory documents also offer a space for the development of other abilities. For instance, Ministerial Rules (Keputusan Menteri) of 1967 and 1994 prioritized reading in English. The overall order of priority was changed from reading, listening, writing, and speaking in 1967 to reading, listening, speaking, and writing in 1994 (Komaria, 1998). In conclusion, English education in Indonesia is legally required as part of the Basic Curriculum, and it can be taught as early as Primary Four. The law also allows for using English as a medium of instruction to develop knowledge of a particular skill or subject. Despite focusing on reading, other skills such as writing, listening, and speaking are also recognized and prioritized.

English as a foreign language (EFL)

Apart from being a language of communication, English is also taught as a subject to foster the students' cognitive, affective, and interpersonal abilities. The purpose of teaching English as a subject is to assist learners in gaining proficiency in other academic disciplines, as well as to enhance their English language proficiency. Additionally, the instruction of English aims to instill effective communication skills in learners, which will benefit them in various personal and professional contexts (Suherdi, 2012). Indonesia is a country that faces a linguistic challenge. While the official language of the country is Indonesian, which serves as a unifying force for the diverse population, English has become the language of international communication. The success of Indonesian as a national language has been achieved through a gradual development process, allowing it to meet the communication needs of modern society. However, the price paid for this success is that many Indonesians lack proficiency in English, which is an essential language for international business and diplomacy. Despite the challenges, the Indonesian government and private institutions are making significant efforts to improve English language education in schools and universities. Recognizing the importance of communicating effectively in a globalized world, English has been given a more significant role in the Indonesian education system. The government has implemented various programs to enhance the

teaching of English as a second language, including hiring more qualified English teachers, providing language training for existing teachers, and offering scholarships for Indonesian students to study abroad. Moreover, the Indonesian government has also established partnerships with international institutions to promote English language learning. These partnerships have resulted in the development of new curricula and teaching materials that incorporate modern teaching methods, such as online learning and interactive multimedia tools. As a result of these efforts, the number of Indonesians who are proficient in English is increasing, and the country is becoming more competitive in the global economy. Although English proficiency is still a challenge for many Indonesians, significant progress has been made to improve English language education in the country. With continued efforts and investments, Indonesia will be better equipped to communicate effectively with the global community, leading to increased economic opportunities and cultural exchange.

English is the official language in administrative and business settings in many countries, similar to the national language status in Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines. This circumstance advances several advantages to those who are proficient in English. However, in Indonesia, English is neither an official nor a second language. Although most of the population speaks the national language, there is a multilingual environment where many individuals also speak one or more local languages.

Indonesia has made significant steps in adopting Bahasa Indonesia as a national language, which has resulted in a large number of people using it for daily communication. However, when it comes to promoting English for international communication, the country has not been as successful. Clearly, this poses a limitation, indicating that although policies for the development of Indonesia have seen relative success, the same cannot be said for English (Dardjowidjojo, 1996; Dardjowidjojo, 2003b; Dardjowidjojo, 2003c).

As per Huda (2000), a factor hindering progress is the government's hesitancy to officially recognize it as a second language. Some believe that employing English as a medium of instruction might adversely affect Indonesia. The majority of the population still struggle with their inadequate knowledge of the language, which limits their ability to access academic articles and give presentations in English. This is a significant disadvantage for the country as a whole, as proficiency in English is essential for global communication and cooperation. Despite the potential benefits of being bilingual, English remains important as a global language of communication, the government has been hesitant to promote English proficiency. This lack of recognition has raised concerns that using English as a medium of instruction may have a negative impact on Indonesian learners. As a result, the quality of education in Indonesia has been hindered by the government's hesitancy to know English as a second language officially. This is a major factor hindering educational attainment in the country. It is crucial for the government to take steps towards promoting English proficiency as it can have a significant impact on the country's development. With the increasing importance of global communication and cooperation, it is imperative for Indonesia to ensure that its citizens have the necessary skills and knowledge to participate in the global community.

CONCLUSION

This paper delves into the intricate and multifaceted realm of teaching English as a second language (ESL). This research highlights how political and historical circumstances shape this

field. Understanding the challenges and opportunities of teaching and learning English in diverse contexts is crucial, and this study delves into the deep roots of ESL to emphasize this point. To accumulate insights into the complexities of language acquisition within the EFL context, the authors conducted rigorous library research and presented effective solutions for addressing these challenges. Moreover, this article offers a comprehensive historical overview of the impact of Dutch colonization on Indonesia's education system and English language teaching practices. By examining the historical context, the article underscores the importance of acknowledging the past and its influence on contemporary ESL practices.

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