

Multilingualism in Education in Indonesia: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Education in many countries of the world takes place in multilingual contexts. This implies a notion that in the education system, there is a diversity of policies and regulations each country takes to determine the kinds of languages used as mediums of instruction to run the education. Bilingual and multilingual educations refer to the use of two or more languages as mediums of instruction. In much of the specialized literature, the two types are subsumed under the term bilingual education (UNESCO, 2003). The term of multilingual education has been firstly used by UNESCO in 1999 in the General Conference Resolution 12 to refer to the use of at least three languages, the mother tongue, a regional or national language and an international language in education (UNESCO, 2003). Multilingual education has also been implemented in Indonesia with regard to its importance and relation to the existing values for future development. This paper aims to examine the picture of multilingual education in Indonesia particularly related to the use of multiple languages in current practices.

Keywords: bilingualism, multilingualism, language of instruction

Introduction

Education in many countries of the world takes place in multilingual contexts. This means that different societies in different countries across the globe would also have different policies and regulations to run their education system, including the policy to determine the kinds of language of instruction used in the system. In practice, there has been a great diversity of the use of language of instruction in schools or colleges in which formal education takes place. A school or a college can have more than one language used in its education system.

Bilingual and multilingual educations refer to the use of two or more languages as mediums of instruction. In much of the specialized literature, the two types are subsumed under the term bilingual education (UNESCO, 2003). From the perspective of the societies, multilingualism is more a way of life than a problem to be solved. The

challenge is for education systems to adapt to these complex realities and provide a quality education which takes into consideration learners' needs, whilst balancing these at the same time with social, cultural and political demands UNESCO, 2003). The consequence of this issue is that education should facilitate the people to develop themselves in accordance with their interests and potentials. The use of language as medium of instruction should then be well considered in line with the social and cultural values in which they live. People, or in this case are students, would learn well when they understand the language used by teachers. They will obviously find many difficulties when they are in the opposite situation, i.e. they do not understand the language as the medium of instruction.

The term of multilingual education has been firstly used by UNESCO in 1999 in the General Conference Resolution 12 to refer to the use of at least three languages, the mother tongue, a regional or national language and an international language in education (UNESCO, 2003). Multilingual education has also been implemented in Indonesia for years with regard to its importance and relation to the existing social, cultural and political values for future development. In Indonesian context, multilingual education has been implemented for many years involving the use of a national language which is Indonesian, a mother tongue which is dependent on the society in which students live and an international language which is English.

This paper aims to examine the picture of multilingual education in Indonesia particularly related to the use of multiple languages in current practices.

Definitions of Bilingualism and Multilingualism

Bilingualism and multilingualism have been interesting issues in linguistic studies. Bilingual is referred to both a society in which two or more languages are in contact and an individual who has access to more than one linguistic code as a means of social communication. The former deals much with society and is related to the study of sociolinguistics, while the later deals with individuals and is associated with the study of psycholinguistics (Goh and Silver, 2004).

The American Heritage Dictionary states that that a bilingual is able to speak two languages with equal skill, while the Oxford English Dictionary Online mentions that a bilingual is one who can speak two languages (Goh and Silver, 2004). These two definitions imply kinds of criteria for someone to be a bilingual. The former requires someone to have equal skill in both languages while the later just describes that someone is bilingual when he can speak two languages.

Simply by bilingualism is meant the ability to use two languages. However, defining bilingualism is problematic since individuals with varying bilingual characteristics may be classified as bilingual. Definitions of bilingualism range from a minimal proficiency in two languages, to an advanced level of proficiency which allows the speaker to function and appear as a native-like speaker of two languages. A person may describe themselves as bilingual but may mean only the ability to converse and communicate orally. Others may be proficient in reading in two or more languages (or bi-literate). A person may be bilingual by virtue of having grown up learning and using two languages simultaneously (simultaneous bilingualism). Or they may become bilingual by learning a second language sometime after their first language. This is known as sequential bilingualism. To be bilingual means different things to different people (NALDIC, 2011).

In relation to multilingualism, Goh and Silver (2004) stated that multilingualism is a situation in society in which more than one language is existed. The people in the society are usually bi-or multilingual although this is not always the case for everyone. Multilingualism is also defined as the act of using *polyglotism*, or using multiple languages, either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers. A multilingual person, in a broad sense, is then one who can communicate in more than one language, be it actively (through speaking, writing, or signing) or passively (through listening, reading, or perceiving) (<http://en.wikipedia.org>).

Kress and Van Leeuwen in Meyer 2011 stated that multilingualism entails communication between interlocutors from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds as well as how languages that have a different social and historical status in a

community get taken up. Furthermore, it entails the manner, mode and medium of communicating meaning. Multilingualism also entails the spatial presence of two or more languages in the same space at a given point in time (Meyer, 2011).

The above definitions imply a notion that a society who is multilingual will have some languages which are used as a means of communication. It is always the case that people in the society will then speak some of those languages too with the same level of proficiency as they may have different competence in using the language. There are people who speak the languages fluently but there may also people who can only understand other people's talk but cannot produce related responses.

Bilingualism and Multilingualism in Education

Education nowadays has been a primary need for all people in the world. The issue of Education for All which has been campaigned for long time has gained much attention to the society. People with different backgrounds wherever they are have the equal opportunities to take education. There should not be boundaries or limitations for people to pursue education in various contexts as they are all have the same rights.

In practice, education should consider the values which exist in the societies. It should be committed to the inherent value of cultural diversity, including the value related to the language spoken by the people as a means of communication, and also the need to maintain it. With this respect, there will be integrated efforts which promote the use of different languages in educational contexts.

Bilingual and multilingual educations according to UNESCO (2003) refer to the use of two or more languages as mediums of instruction. In much of the specialized literature, the two types are subsumed under the term bilingual education. From this perspective, it can be considered that in bilingual education, there will be two different languages used as the medium of instruction, while on the multilingual one, the languages can be more. The use of different languages in this context will be influenced by various and interconnected factors.

Bilingual education involves teaching academic content in two languages, in a native and secondary language with varying amounts of each language used in accordance with the program model. In relation, multilingual education typically refers to "first-language-first" education, that is, schooling which begins in the mother tongue and transitions to additional languages. Typically, Multilanguage Education (MLE) programs are situated in developing countries where speakers of minority languages tend to be disadvantaged in the mainstream of education system (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). Those definitions overview the use of a non-single language as a medium of instruction used in the education system.

Multilingualism in Education in Indonesia

It has been previously narrated that multilingual education system should take into account the languages known in the community and their links to various aspects of community and national life. In the process of education, though there is an official language of instruction, there is possibility that students incorporate the use of other languages that they are familiar with. In Indonesia, multilingual education can be seen in the way it is carried out.

UNESCO (2013) mentions that multilingual education incorporates the use of at least three languages of instruction: the mother tongue, a regional or national language and an international language. The language of instruction itself refers to the language used for teaching the basic curriculum of the educational system. The choice of the language or indeed the languages of instruction (educational policy might recommend the use of several languages of instruction) is a recurrent challenge in the development of quality education (UNESCO, 2003). In context of education in Indonesia, the use of those three mentioned languages may describe the phenomenon of multilingual education.

The use of mother tongue in Indonesian education

In many schools in Indonesia, mother tongue has been widely used as a form of language of instructions particularly those in elementary or primary schools. UNESCO (2003) mentions that mother tongue instruction generally refers to the use of the

learners' mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Additionally, it can refer to the mother tongue as a subject of instruction. It is considered to be an important component of quality education, particularly in the early years. The expert view is that mother tongue instruction should cover both the teaching of and the teaching through this language.

In many schools in Indonesia, the use of mother tongue is still employed in process of education in early years. Though it is Indonesian language which serves as the official language of instruction, it is undeniable that the use of mother tongue is still necessary by both teachers and students. This often happens when teachers have to teach and deal with students with different backgrounds and status. The type of mother tongue used in schools will be different depending on the setting in which the schools are situated. The school inhabitants which are situated in Java Island, for example in Central Java, will possibly use different Javanese too. They may employ different dialects and registers when they are communicating.

The use of mother tongue plays a crucial role as the language of identity of a group and one which probably has the greatest affective pull (Joseph in Shameem, 2007). In the classroom the mother tongue can scaffold learning during group tasks where students use it for planning, discussion, brainstorming and reflection. In real practice, many of Indonesian students particularly those in schools use their mother tongue when they are doing discussion inside or outside classrooms. Some argue that the incorporation of mother tongue helps students understand the issue of discussion more and speak more fluently to express their ideas. This seems to be influenced much by their daily communication especially in family and friendship domains.

The use of Bahasa Indonesia in Indonesian education

Nowadays, the majority of countries in the world are monolingual nation states in the sense of recognizing, de jure or de facto, only one official language for government and legal purposes. That is not to say that they are not bilingual or multilingual societies, but rather that while there may be many languages widely used in a country these do not necessarily have the legal authority of an official language. The choice of language in

the educational system confers a power and prestige through its use in formal instruction. Not only is there a symbolic aspect, referring to status and visibility, but also a conceptual aspect referring to shared values and worldview expressed through and in that language (UNESCO, 2003).

Similar with Indonesia, though there are thousands of languages across the nation, the country recognizes one national language, i.e. *Bahasa Indonesia* as its official language. It has been declared as the official language which unites the diverse members of Indonesian people by a declaration named the Youth Pledge made on 28 October 1928 by young Indonesian nationalists in which they proclaimed three ideals, one motherland, one nation and one language.

Indonesia has been successful in the adoption of Indonesian as a national language, as demonstrated by the large numbers of people who now use Indonesian for daily communication (Lauder, 2008). It is the high variety which serves in official situations. It serves important functions in many aspects such as education, employment, legislation and administration. In education, it serves as the language of instruction as implied in the Law Number 20 Year 2003 about Indonesian Education system. As a result, in any educational levels, *Bahasa Indonesia* should be taught and used as the medium of instruction. Though there have been emerging bilingual schools, the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* cannot be displaced.

The use of Foreign Language in Indonesian Education

According to the Law Number 20 year 2003, Indonesian education should encompass the development of foreign language to students. The Law states that in addition to *Bahasa Indonesia*, foreign language education should be compulsory to teach to students. One foreign language which has been seriously developed and used in Indonesian education is English. Though there can be some other foreign languages such as Japanese, Mandarin and Chinese, English is the majority. According to the history, English was first taught to Indonesians in 1914 when junior high schools were established (Van der Veur and Lian, 1969 in Lauder, 2008). Though English serves as

foreign language in Indonesia, the opportunities of using English as a medium of instruction in educational contexts has significantly improves from time to time.

English is one of a number of foreign languages which have been in use for some time or which are coming to be taught. These include Dutch, Arabic, English, German, French, Japanese, and latterly, Chinese (pu tong hua). Arabic has long been learned in connection with the Islamic faith. It is not learned for social interaction but for religious purposes, especially for Qur'anic recitation and prayers (sholat). Dutch continues to be learned by students intending study in Holland and business people. The Chinese language and culture were proscribed during the Soeharto years but in the current climate there is a growing interest in learning Chinese driven by China's growing economic importance and the increase in trade and business between the two countries, cultural and ethnic ties among the community of Chinese descendents in Indonesia (Lauder, 2008).

In this advanced era, English is also used for teaching some subjects especially in international standard based schools which are now developing in Indonesia. Students in this situation employ English as the medium for classroom activities such as discussion, presentation, and examinations.

Conclusions

Bilingual and multilingual educations refer to the use of two or more languages as mediums of instruction. In much of the specialized literature, the two types are subsumed under the term bilingual education. Multilingualism in education in Indonesia has been existed since years ago which can be seen on the use of languages as medium of instruction such as the use of the mother tongue, a regional or national language and an international language. In this case, the use of Javanese, *Bahasa Indonesia* and English is the example of the case.

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