

## Language Identity and the Status of English: A Lesson from Indonesia

Identitas dan Status Bahasa Inggris: sebuah pelajaran dari Indonesia

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### Abstract

*This research aimed to understand the status of English in Indonesia concerning its potential to form the language identity of its users. This paper examined the role and function of English in Indonesia from the point of view of its history, sociocultural situations, and language politics. English grew and developed as the first foreign language, especially after the independence of Indonesia. However, the attitudes of some language observers and policymakers towards English were often ambivalent. They were concerned about the potential power of English in negatively influencing the formation of the language identity of its users; at the same time, they also needed the language for national development purposes. This research used qualitative method, and reflexivity as source of the data. This discussion outlines these issues, especially in the education and policy space, and provided views and future directions on how to view the status of the English language and its potential to shape the identity of the language in Indonesia.*

**Keywords:** *Language Identity, Language Status, EFL*

### Abstrak

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui status bahasa Inggris di Indonesia terkait potensinya dalam membentuk identitas bahasa penggunaannya. Penelitian ini mengkaji peran dan fungsi bahasa Inggris di Indonesia ditinjau dari sejarahnya, situasi sosial budaya, dan politik bahasanya. bahasa Inggris tumbuh dan berkembang sebagai bahasa asing pertama, terutama setelah kemerdekaan Indonesia. Namun, sikap beberapa pengamat bahasa dan pembuat kebijakan terhadap bahasa Inggris seringkali ambivalen. Mereka khawatir tentang potensi kekuatan bahasa Inggris dalam mempengaruhi secara negative pembentukan identitas bahasa penggunaannya; pada saat yang sama, mereka juga membutuhkan bahasa untuk kepentingan pembangunan nasional. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, dan refleksifitas untuk sumber pengumpulan data. Diskusi ini menguraikan isu- isu tersebut, khususnya dalam ruang Pendidikan dan kebijakan, serta memberikan pandangan dan arahan ke depan tentang bagaimana melihat status bahasa Inggris dan potensinya untuk membentuk identitas Bahasa Indonesia.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Identitas Bahasa, Status Bahasa, EFL*

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## INTRODUCTION

When referring to the history of Indonesia, the Dutch, who colonized for 350 years, was reluctant to provide education to the indigenous population. English was not a priority or even not formally or informally taught. Very few indigenous people were educated. The Dutch colonialists differed significantly from the British, who gave their colonies education. At that time, secondary schools in Indonesia were only attended by Dutch children and the children of elected local officials. Although English was taught as a foreign language in these schools, very few indigenous children attended classes. It was not until 1907 that western-style education was introduced. In 1914 English was taught for the first time when junior high schools were founded. The high school class that accepts Indonesians only taught Dutch. English had never been taught to be a medium of communication (Lauder, 2008) as cited in (Khasbani, 2019). During the Japanese colonial period, the natives were even forbidden to learn English. Although briefly occupying Indonesian territory during the second world war, Japan completely changed the Dutch education curriculum. Then on August 17, 1945, the indigenous people declared Indonesia's independence. Since independence, it was decided that English should be the foreign language taught in schools, not Dutch. English was chosen because of its status as an international language, while Dutch was the colonizers' language and did not have the status of an international language. Although English had been taught in schools since the 1950s, the national curriculum document introduced new English subjects in 1984. English was not included as an official subject in the national curriculum document before that year. To find out more details about the development of teaching English in the national curriculum from time to time below is a table of the curriculum for English subjects since independence.

Table 1. the curriculum for English subjects since independence.

Year	Name of the English Curriculum	Features
1947	Rencana Pelajaran (learning Plans)	It was established to reform Indonesian education from the Influence of the Netherlands based educational system aiming to produce students with character.
1952	Unravels Subject Plan	This curriculum leads to the curriculum of national education system. This curriculum is that every lesson must consider the content of subject that connected with everyday life.
1964	Education Plan	This curriculum is critically concern with science, so that the learning program focused on Pancawardhana, namely the development of moral, intellectual, emotional/ artistic skills, and physical.
1968	1968 Curriculum	Curriculum 1968 has a goal to form a human Pancasila sincere, strong, and healthy physical, enhance skills and acumen physical, moral, moral character, and religious.

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1975	1975 Curriculum	The curriculum 1975 prepared as a substitute for the curriculum 1968, where changes were made using the following approach; goal oriented, integrative approach, emphasizing the efficiency and effectiveness in terms of resources and time; confessional approach, and Influenced behavior psychology.
1994	1994 Curriculum	This curriculum use process or meaningful approach. In this curriculum, there is credit point, and use meaningful teaching CBSA
2004	2004 Curriculum	This curriculum use competency-based curriculum approach. It focus on decentralized based curriculum.

In the 1984 curriculum, language teaching had undergone fundamental changes related to the approach used in the classroom. The behavioristic approach was no longer relevant to improving language competence, so it needed to be directed to a communicative approach. In this approach, learning was designed with students as the center. In CBSA (*Cara Belajar Siswa Aktif*) or Active Student Learning Method, students were encouraged to engage in learning to obtain an optimal learning experience actively. Since 1994, the national curriculum had undergone an overhaul. However, for language learning, the approach had not changed, namely the communicative approach, which aimed to foster communicative competence. (Wirza, 2017) states that In subsequent developments, the focus of the language learning curriculum shifted from linguistics to topical themes and functional skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. After ten years, the 1994 curriculum was replaced with the 2004 curriculum and the 2013 curriculum. Language teaching changed from a communicative approach to a Systemic Functional Linguistics approach, formulated and developed by MAK Halliday. This approach emphasized the potential meaning in language and how people exchange meaning through language. In the curriculum, systemic functional linguistics was raised by teaching language composition: narrative, recount, report, exposition, and review. This concept has not changed even though the national curriculum has changed several times after 2014.

Although experiencing changes and improvements from one curriculum to another, implementing or applying these various approaches in the classroom is often inappropriate. Changes do not follow curriculum changes in the classroom. Students and teachers often find applying and using English in the most basic functions challenging. Another solution that has been considered in implementing the curriculum is Indonesian-English bilingual education which is believed to encourage the use of English in Indonesia. Most Indonesians are already multilingual or at least bilingual. Indonesians have the potential to reach a functional level of mastery of English and achieve communicative competence.

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### Discussion

#### *English as an International language*

It is undeniable that English currently has the status of an international and global language, which is one of the reasons Indonesia has placed it as the first foreign language. The global status of the English language cannot be separated from many users. It is estimated that around two billion English speakers worldwide. Crystal as cited in (Yusny, 2013) states The development of the English language to reach a vast number of users is the result of colonialization until the early twentieth century and the presence of the superpower of the United States as the controller of the world economy.

With the wide range of users worldwide, various variations of the English language appear in various contexts. Various models and categorizations are proposed to unravel the complexity of the variety of English. One of the most popular is the circle model, which divides English users in the world into three: inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle. The inner circle includes Canada, England, Australia, and the United States, which are countries that use English as their mother tongue or first language by most of the population. Outer ring countries place English as a vital language in administration or education, sometimes explicitly as an official or formal language, such as Singapore, Pakistan, India, South Africa, Malaysia, Ghana, Gambia, and Sri Lanka. These countries have historically had colonial ties to Great Britain. The expanding circle includes countries with no colonial history with Great Britain, where English is used as a foreign language. Indonesia is included in this category along with Thailand, Korea, China, Japan, Israel, Brazil, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia, the data is taken from (Kachru, 1990). (Kirkpatrick, 2000) as cited in (Bacon, 2018) states that the status of EFL in Indonesia indicates that English does not have a formal administrative or institutional role. In Indonesia, English has no administrative or institutional role in education, courts, government bureaucracy, or special status in state language legislation. English is also not widely used by the community. This follows the definition of a foreign language seen from the socio-cultural-political function, namely language that is not used in the realm of daily interpersonal communication, is not used in the realm of education, and is not used for political and government communication purposes. This follows the definition of a foreign language seen from the socio-cultural-political function, namely language that is not used in the realm of daily interpersonal communication, is not used in the realm of education, and is not used for political and government communication purposes (Alwasilah, 2004) as cited in (Stockton, 2018). In particular, despite its status as a foreign language in official national legislation, English has a high status in society. This is due to public perception of the potential of the English language (Lauder, 2008) in several ways; in the business economy, the attractiveness of the English-speaking United States as the country with the most robust economy in the world; English as the official language of the United Nations is the reason for its importance in international relations; In the world of education, English acts as the most widely used language in writing scientific publications. Some of these factors, in addition to other factors, have raised the position of English in Indonesian society.

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### ***English Among Other Languages in Indonesia***

Indonesian as the national language is a success story of language politics. The multilingual and multicultural Indonesian society can be united with a national language identity. The Indonesian language is continuously updated and developed in line with the national language policy. Indonesia plays a vital role in various spheres of government, education, and other sociocultural situations. The formation of the Indonesian language prioritizes the codification of previously existing regional languages. The function of regional languages is to strengthen local ties and cultural identity (Sneddon, 2003) in addition to national and regional languages, another foreign language with a significant role in Arabic, a religious language. Arabic has long been studied concerning the religion of Islam. Learned not for social interaction but religious purposes, especially for recitation and prayer (*salat*). The status and role of English in Indonesia can be seen in the language situation based on the main categories of the national, regional, and foreign languages. One way to distinguish one foreign language from another is to look at the role and use of the language. Not only is Arabic a foreign language that has a unique role in Indonesia, but Dutch also still has a role in understanding Indonesian history and law. Some students studying history and law still need Dutch. For years Chinese culture and language were prohibited from playing a role in society. However, there is great interest in learning Mandarin in the current post-reform political situation. This interest grew from the attractiveness of strengthening the Chinese economy (Lauder, 2008). English has a special status among the foreign languages used in Indonesia because, since independence, it has become a compulsory subject in schools.

### ***Language Identity Negotiation***

In Indonesia, where English is considered a high position in society, policymakers and observers have an ambivalent attitude. The tension and tug of war are between the need to use English for national development purposes and the fear of too much influence on the English language, especially regarding cultural identity and national identity (Lauder, 2008). The framing of English can be seen from the mention of the role of the language, namely the English metaphor as a tool, which can be used for development purposes. English is very much needed but limited to things that encourage technological and economic growth.

English is not allowed to express the role of its cultural identity and is considered a threat. Sometimes educators in Indonesia worry that the widespread knowledge of English will negatively impact eastern behavior, culture, and values. The mention of "western liberal values" in English is a form of the depiction of educators to protect the cultural identity of indigenous people. This ambiguous and ambivalent view is called by Kartono "exolinguaphobia" or "language schizophrenia," which is nothing but an irrational and emotional dimension in language policy (Kartono, 1976) as cited in (Sutami, 2016).

Similar ambivalence also exists in the opinion of the importance of the absorption of English into Indonesian. It support by Alwi's statement which cited in (Sudaryanto et al., 2019), they say that One of the reasons for the importance of the English language is its role in the vocabulary of modern technology and scientific information. The significant influence of English vocabulary in Indonesian by some observers is considered a threat, so there needs to be a policy that requires all names to be in Indonesian. Many people in Indonesia see English as a carrier of some prestige. There is a kind of prestige when someone can speak

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English. The ability to speak English is required for applying for jobs in many institutions and companies. English is a symbol of sophistication, education, and modernity. There are concerns from some language observers about the habits of educated people in Indonesia who often insert English terms when speaking. Another discourse that frames the status of English in Indonesia is the post-colonial imperialism discourse. In this frame, there is a dichotomous distinction between Indonesian, which is patriotic and nationalistic, while English is not. So far, the general understanding of sociolinguistics assumes that language has the same potential for meaning-making (Sally A Johnson; Tommaso M Milani, 2010). Poststructuralist fundamental assumptions about language's meaning, subjectivity, and social structure lead to the understanding that language cannot be neutral, valued, free, or autonomous when used by speakers in certain discourses and contexts. Here language ideology is seen as presuppositions, cultural ideas, presuppositions through which a group of people frames and evaluate linguistic practices.

English and its spread create generalizations of values and ideologies related to the language. Not only purely sociolinguistic problems, but the consequences of the global expansion of the English language are also closely related to issues of ideology and language power as a form of linguistic imperialism (Wirza, 2017). According to Phillipson, ELT pedagogy has directed English as an international language par excellence. English is implicitly imposed as the language of technological progress and the global economy (Robert Phillipson, 2009). The dominance of this ideology can be understood from how the people of expanding circle countries learn English. Most of them get English not naturally but from a curriculum that provides standards for the English language of the inner circle. Criticism from some observers on ELT practice is the pedagogical direction toward homogeneity of targets and learning outcomes.

At the same time, ideology in English discourse moves into a paradox; oppressive but liberating (Canagarajah, 2000). The nature of the paradox is intertwined between the intimidation of English hegemony on the identity of EFL learners and the liberating potential because learning English is a form of investment. EFL learners consciously or subconsciously invest in EFL learning. The investment choices primarily focus on whether language learning may yield symbolic and material resources as rewards. Norton presents the notion of investment to augment established motivational frameworks to explain language learners' dynamics and various personality features. The newly formed language of investment characterizes language learners' selected attempts to gain competence in their target language regarding their history, sociocultural context, personal desires, and multiple identities. Since investment views language learners as continually reorganizing identities and relationships to the environment as they speak. It describes learners' identities as constantly shifting across place and time and considers learners active agents. An investment in EFL is an investment in the continually negotiated or contested identity of the language learner (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Responding to the theory of language learning as an investment, Kubota proposed the notion of EFL learning as consumption. In contrast to the concept of investment in EFL learning which sees a second language as social and cultural capital, Kubota's concept sees the potential for leisure and consumption in EFL learning. EFL learning as consumption sees the enjoyment of language learners in socializing using newly acquired language. They learn the language not to invest culturally but rather because of the enjoyment or leisure in the learning process. They enjoy communicating with foreigners.

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They learn a language for leisure, pleasure, enjoyment, or joyance. EFL learning is acquiring the opportunities to discover something new and exciting, an instrument of socialization with people speaking the target language, and constructing new identities when socializing with others (Kubota, 2011).

Many researchers use identity negotiation to describe language learners' various identities and identity construction while learning the target language. The notion of Identity negotiation portrays EFL identity as continuously renegotiated and contested concerning varied language ideologies, power relations, and learners' sense of selfness (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2003). Negotiation is essential in a new language acquisition environment since learners carry previously established identities. Because previously repertoires and acquired identities of learners can contradict standard norms or be unrecognized in different discourse communities, learners tend to negotiate and renegotiate their identities, sometimes ending in rejection.

Poststructuralism, influenced by Bourdieu and Foucault, helped scholars analyze language learners' identities concerning power and identity. Many researchers claim that language is ideologically irreducible, reflecting the dominant group's sociopolitical interests and underlying power relations. In the context of language acquisition, it is the center of the construction and replication of symbolic dominance (Buchanan et al., 1993). Under asymmetric power relations, the inability to manage identity may lead to nonparticipation and marginalization. Norton discusses power and identity in EFL learning. Power discourse may explain how EFL learners' identities are negotiated. Inspired by this critical stance, researchers may link EFL acquisition and investigate the identity of EFL learners while analyzing power relations, socio-political situations, and ideologies (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

### **Conclusion**

Undeniably, English in Indonesia is very much needed for national development. However, the need for English is only instrumental as a tool in economic discourse, scientific knowledge, and technological development. English has the status as the first foreign language, but policymakers and observers are concerned about the negative impact on the identity of the national language. English is not allowed to express the role of its cultural identity and is considered a threat. Sometimes educators in Indonesia worry that the widespread knowledge of English will negatively impact eastern behavior, culture, and values. The mention of "western liberal values" in English is a form of the depiction of educators to protect the cultural identity of indigenous people. This ambiguous and ambivalent view is called by Kartono "exolinguaphobia" or "language schizophrenia," which is nothing but an irrational and emotional dimension in language policy.

Similar ambivalence also exists in the opinion of the importance of the absorption of English into Indonesian. One of the reasons for the importance of the English language is its role in the vocabulary of modern technology and scientific information. The significant influence of English vocabulary in Indonesian by some observers is considered a threat, so there needs to be a policy that requires all names to be in Indonesian (Alwi, 2000) as cited in (Sudaryanto et al., 2019). Ideology in English discourse simultaneously moves in a paradox; oppressive but liberating (Canagarajah, 2000). The nature of the paradox is

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intertwined between the intimidation of English hegemony on the identity of EFL learners and the liberating potential because learning English is a form of investment.

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