

TEACHING ENGLISH AT HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDONESIA: SEARCHING FOR USEFULNESS

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Abstract

Foreign language is one of compulsory subjects for every student including students at higher education to learn. English becomes the choice as a foreign language learnt in many universities in Indonesia. This is a good choice since up to now English is still an international language that is needed in global society. Higher education graduates live as members of global society and therefore are demanded to be able to communicate in English. However, if students learn it only for two credits during their time studying at universities can it meet the demand? What can the students learn from two credits of English? What should be taught? Teaching English in such situation sometimes makes the lecturers confused. Offering higher education students two credits of English is just like a formality. It is not really useful. The English teaching at higher education must be changed into one which contributes to the students' success in the global communication using English. This paper will offer the ways how teaching English in higher education should be conducted. It will be started by discussing the policy of teaching foreign language in higher education made by the government. Then, examining the goals of teaching English and the materials taught to the students. If the usefulness is the target, a revision of teaching English to higher education students must be made.

Key words: *higher education, teaching English, usefulness.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Now English is an international language; therefore, it is needed by everyone who wants to be involved or to take part in the global world. Mastering English will be a passport for someone to enter the global world. Without mastering English, one may get difficulty to compete with others in the global level. Friedman (2005) as cited in McKay (2012:32) argues that competent human resources is only economically rewarding in the global context if they speak English. As an example he takes India that has few natural resources. Its economy is growing because India has educated its elites in the science, engineering, and medicine so that a surplus of English-speaking engineers is found there.

Higher education graduates are potential human resources. However, not many graduates in Indonesia can speak English well. If they want to compete in the global world, English is one of the main requirements. Since the world is global now, the attention to the teaching of English cannot be ignored. It must be seriously managed.

The English teaching in higher education has been determined as a compulsory subject (BSNP, 2010). However, it just weighs 2 credits. It is not enough to make graduates proficient in English. Although some universities have added more credits for English, the government needs to be more serious by making clear regulation/law related to English teaching at higher education so that we will have graduates that can compete in the global world.

This paper discusses the English teaching at Indonesian higher education. It is started by studying the government policy on higher education, the English teaching on higher

education, and will be closed by a kind of recommendation to the government in a form of a proposal of change.

A. DISCUSSION

Government's Policy on Higher Education

The policy made by the government in relation to higher education can be found in some laws. Higher education matters are regulated in Law of the Republic of Indonesia No 12 year 2012. Chapter 1 article 4 states the functions of higher education. One of them is that higher education is to develop innovative, responsive, creative, skillful, competitive and cooperative graduates. Article 5 in that chapter states the goals of higher education. One of the goals is producing graduates that master science and technology to fulfill the nation needs and to increase the nation competitiveness. From those two articles the government obviously stated the importance of increasing nation competitiveness.

The next government policy related to higher education is Indonesian republican presidential decree No 8 of 2012 on Indonesian national qualifications framework (KKNI). This decree sets the competences that each level of graduate students must have. According to this decree the graduates of Strata 1 must have level 6 of competences. The competences are:

1. Able to apply the expertise and to utilize science, technology, and art in the related discipline to solve problems and able to adapt to the situation at hand
2. Master the theoretical concepts of a certain science and specific theoretical concepts of the science deeply, and be able to formulate procedural problem solving.
3. Able to take the right decisions based on analysis of information and data, and is able to provide guidance in selecting a variety of alternative solutions independently and in group.
4. Responsible for their own work and can be given responsibility for the achievement of organizational work.

Another government policy on higher education is regulation made by the national standard agency of education on Standard of Content. Based on the standard of content 2010 the curriculum of higher education must contain several general and expertise subjects to develop the graduate competences. Taking general subjects is compulsory for every higher education student. The general subjects comprise Religion, Civic education, Indonesian language, English, and statistics or mathematics. These five general subjects weigh 10 credits, 2 credits for each.

Regarding the three policies made by the Indonesian government above, a conclusion can be drawn below.

1. Higher education students must have competences that enable them to gain nation competitiveness
2. Higher education students have to learn English because English is included in the compulsory subject.

It can be seen clearly that the policy to gain nation competitiveness is in line with deciding English as a compulsory subject to learn. The problem is how students learn English in higher education.

English teaching in Indonesian higher education

In Indonesia, the status of English is a foreign language. According to Stern (1983:16) foreign language learning is conducted with some different purposes. It can be to travel abroad, to communicate with native speakers, to read of a foreign literature, or to read of foreign scientific and technical work. He further states that a formal instruction is needed in foreign language learning due to the lack of exposure in the environment of the learners.

Referring to the standard of content for higher education, the goal of teaching foreign language/ English in Indonesian higher education is to equip the learners in improving the ability to comprehend texts written in foreign language/English for academic purposes and specific expertise in accordance with their discipline. Thus, the emphasis of teaching English in higher education is given on reading English scientific texts. This is English for academic purposes.

Teaching reading of English scientific text is not easy. Besides the reading skill itself, the teacher must understand the subject knowledge. The students need to learn technical terms too. Both teacher and students have to learn more things than when the subject is general reading. According to Grabe and Stoller (2011:7) reading to learn from texts typically occurs in academic context. This type of reading requires abilities to:

- a. remember main ideas as well as a number of details
- b. recognize and build rhetorical frames that organise the information in the text
- c. link the text to the reader's knowledge base

They further state that this type of reading makes stronger inferencing demands than general reading to connect text information with background knowledge.

Considering the characteristics of suggested reading above, it is difficult if lecturers just have 2 credits for that. There are linguistics elements that students have to master before they gain the ability to find main ideas, recognizing and building rhetorical frames. They have to understand sentence patterns, vocabulary, discourse, etc. Therefore, based on observation it is found that more departments in faculty give more credits for English subject. They have more than 2 credits for English (see table 1).

Still referring to the standard of content of higher education, the government policy says that higher education students learn English as a compulsory subject for 2 credits during their study. Based on a brief observation on several curricula in 10 higher educations it is found that some universities allocate 2 credits for English, others 3 to 5 credits, each depends on the internal policy of the university. Here is the allocation of credits given to English subjects in several institutions.

Table 1. Weight of learning English in Indonesian higher education

No	Institution	Credit
1.	Mechanical Engineering (FTI- ITS)	2 credits
2.	Industrial Engineering (ITB)	2 credits
3.	Faculty of teacher training and education UAD	2 credits
4.	Management (UGM)	4 credits
5.	Unesa Surabaya	5 credits
6.	Management (Undip)	3 credits
7.	Management (Univ Padjadjaran)	3 credits
8.	Industrial Engineering (Undip)	3 credits
9.	Management (Unhas)	4 credits + 4 credits optional
10.	Informatics Engineering dan Computer (Unsyiah)	2 credits

From the table above it is clearly identified that the English learning in Indonesian higher education varies in the load. The above table shows that at the average students learn English 3 credits during their study. What is taught with that amount of credits? As there is not yet regulation, the answer is varied. One teaches grammar, the other teaches general English, and others teach reading.

Teaching English in overseas higher education

To compare the English for Higher Education in Indonesia and that for other countries, an example is given. Let us learn the English teaching for higher education in Israel designed for teacher education. In Israel, the English teaching for higher education is managed by the government. The goal of the English teaching is to allow students access to English language materials. The emphasis of teaching English is given on reading.

In Israel higher education, the English teaching is set in the form of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. The course is started by conducting a placement test. Based on the result of the test, students will be grouped in different level. The level consists of Basic/ below level, Intermediate 1 and 2, Advanced I and II, Proficient/Exemption level. Each level will take 60 hours and students learn English 4 times a week. Students belong to basic level have to take matriculation; students belong to proficiency level are freed from taking the course. As students may be placed in different level, how long each student learns English will be varied. The better the test result, the shorter time the students will learn English.

Observing the material served, the English curriculum is emphasized on reading relevant texts. Oral and written exercises are integrated in classroom activities. The material for the basic level covers simple texts, grammatical aspect within context, vocabulary development, and dictionary skills. In the intermediate level the texts learnt are expository prose. Vocabulary learning is emphasized. Students are taught reading skills and strategies and various aspects of English grammar. In the advanced level 1, students are taught authentic and abridged texts. They are taught the structure of the research article. In vocabulary aspect students learn words that are taken from academic words list. In grammar points, students will learn complex sentences. For advanced level 2, students learn unabridged authentic texts and learn to categorize journal based on its level and genre. Students are encouraged to use deductive and inductive approaches in inferring the texts read.

From the summary above, we can conclude how serious the English program for higher education has been managed in Israel. The weight of credits, the learning system, and the materials prepared may support the goals of the English teaching and eventually to the education goals.

A reflection on English teaching in Indonesian higher education

The reflection will be based on some facts related to the teaching in higher education below.

1. Higher education graduates must be competent in science and technology so that Indonesia can compete with other nations.

To compete with other nations means to be involved in global world. One of the requirements to perform that is to master the language used in the global world, which is now English. When graduates are competent in science and technology but they do not master English they may get difficulty to perform in international level, even ASEAN level. It means that they cannot compete with other graduates who master the international language. A challenge is now in front of us. The coming of AFTA in 2015 could not be ignored. The nation with more competent human resources will win the competition.

2. Higher education students are required to learn foreign language/ English. This is a good policy if the government wants the students to have a high competitiveness. In fact, suggesting higher education to have 2 credits for learning English is not enough. It is almost illogical to produce graduates who learn English only in one semester to be able to compete with other graduates whose English is good.

3. Students of higher education learn English with emphasis on reading. Lecturers get confused on what subject to teach with only 2 credits. To be able to read well, moreover science or technical textbooks, many important things should be taught to the learner. So, it is too demanding if students who learn English only in 2 credits are supposed to be able to read English text well.

By considering the three facts about the English teaching above, it can be concluded that teaching English to higher education students in Indonesia needs some revision. Observing the average time spent for learning English and comparing it to what has been done in another country, we will know that teaching English in our country is far from being useful. The principle of usefulness must be considered. To make it happens the government needs to change the policy of teaching English at higher education.

A proposal of change

To make the English teaching at higher education useful so that it supports the achievement of goals of teaching English as well as the goal of higher education some changes are proposed here. This proposal is addressed to the government, especially the ministry of education.

1. The policy

The government has to make the English program for higher education students in line with the other regulations. There are two things to consider. First, the English teaching must support the students in becoming competitive human resources as the regulation states. It means students have to master English so that they can compete in national and global level. For this reason, they have to learn English more than 2 credits. The government should change the statement that states English is given in 2 credits. The credits should be changed into at least 4 credits. This will give a chance for teachers to allocate time needed to deal with teaching reading of specific texts. Second, the framework of qualification needs to mention the foreign language competence in each level. This is to support the human resources that will compete in the global world.

2. Setting the standards

It is not enough if the government just regulate the amount of credits for students to learn English. The government should set the standard of English competence for graduate students. It can be based on the score of TOEFL, IELTS, or other standardized tests of English. Students need to show a certificate of the score if they have. Students who have passed the score may take the 4 credits offered. Those who have not, have to take the 4 credits of English and take any English courses outside the university till they reach the required score.

3. The program

Considering the policy that the goal of teaching foreign language/ English in Indonesian higher education is improving the ability to comprehend texts written in foreign language/English for academic purposes and specific expertise in accordance with their discipline, the government can definitely decide the program for English teaching in higher education. Based on the description of the language teaching goal, the appropriate program is English for Academic Purposes (EAP). To produce good result, this program must be well managed. There are some steps that must be taken in designing the program. According to Carkin (2005:86) the implementation of EAP program involves needs assessment, evaluation, analysis of student goals and skills and a determination of language features, vocabulary, organizational structures, discursal patterns, and genres associated with the varieties of English found in university texts and classroom. This can be used by the government as a base to determine what must be included in the English for Academic Purposes.

The change in government policy related to teaching English at higher education, the clear program that must be run by the English teachers, and the standardization of English competence of graduates will make teaching English at higher education more meaningful and useful so that it will affect positively on the graduate competent. Eventually it can contribute to the goal of education- building competitive human resources.

B. CONCLUSION

The recent English teaching at higher education in Indonesia is not yet satisfying. Since students learn English in limited time, it cannot make students have the ability to use English to compete in the global world. This condition must be changed. There must be a policy that facilitates the students to learn English in more meaningful and useful way. The government needs to change the former regulation and prepare a well planned program for teaching English at higher education in order that the graduates are ready to compete in this global era. Besides adding the number of hours to learn English, the government needs to have definite program for the English teaching at higher education level.

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