

E-CLUE

(Journal of English Culture, Language, Literature, and Education)

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**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
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LANGUAGE POLICY AND ENGLISH TEACHING PRACTICES IN INDONESIAN AND THAI PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Nihta V F Liando⁷

INTISARI

Makalah ini mempelajari implikasi kebijakan bahasa untuk pengajaran bahasa asing khususnya implementasi kebijakan bahasa pada pengajaran bahasa Inggris di Indonesia dan Thailand. Data diperoleh dari tokoh-tokoh kunci dalam pendidikan dasar, guru-guru dan dokumen-dokumen. Sejak pemakaian kurikulum 1994, Bahasa Inggris telah dimasukkan sebagai pelajaran pilihan pada kelas empat SD. Di Thailand Bahasa Inggris telah diajarkan pada kelas lima dan enam selama dua decade terakhir. Pengenalan Bahasa Inggris pada sekolah dasar telah dimulai sejak pertengahan tahun 90-an, akan tetapi implementasinya tetap dalam perdebatan diantar sesama pendidik. Pembahasan dalam makalah ini menyangkut implikasi kebijakan tersebut dalam praktek di kelas.

Introduction

Language planning is a relatively new discipline. It has developed rapidly during the last 20 years (Kaplan & Baldauf Jr, 1997). According to Kaplan and Baldauf Jr (1997, p.3), language planning is "a body of ideas, laws and regulations (language policy), change rules, beliefs, and practices intended to achieve a planned change (or to stop change from happening) in the language use in one or more communities".

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Several key terms are used by various writers in this discipline among others a *language policy* functions to regulate the position, use, or preservation of a nation's language or languages (including indigenous languages); a *foreign language policy* relates to the specific regulations or measures regarding the position and use of foreign languages in the country; a *foreign language teaching policy* is specifically concerned with the teaching and learning of foreign languages (van Els, 1994, p.36).

Kaplan, in Baldauf Jr & Luke (1990, p.9), suggests that "within the language policy, it is assumed that certain languages will be used for certain purposes". The close relationship between the use of a language and political power, socioeconomic development, national and local identity and cultural values has led to the increasing realisation of the importance of language policies in the planning of a nation (Kennedy, 1983, p.ix). Therefore, a language policy is essential to give direction to language development in general and to the implementation of language learning programs in particular, including foreign language programs.

In regards to defining policy for foreign language learning, there have been major breakthroughs from time to time resulting in significant improvements in the teaching of English, particularly in primary education as explained later in this paragraph. Many early-age-language-teaching experiments have been conducted over the last three decades. In Thailand, for instance, the education reform in 1996 has changed the TEFL in primary school from year five to begin in year one. In Indonesia, the progress can be seen as the 'green light' from the government to allow teaching English in primary school although not as compulsory subject. However, it should be noted that the practice of teaching English in primary schools is not something we can just take for granted, but it should be well-planned and organised before it is implemented in the classroom. In the case of teaching English as a foreign language, even more complex issues are involved, namely the school environments, the wider

community and the nation in general. Therefore, there is a strong need for a language policy that addresses the teaching of foreign language(s) in formal education contexts. It includes the determination of which language(s) should be taught to meet the needs of the society, defining teacher supply, determining what segment of the student population will be exposed to language education, determining what methodology will be employed, defining the assessment process and determining the support of this activity fiscally and physically (Kaplan & Baldauf Jr, 1997). In short, on a larger scale, language planning decisions relate to the position of languages within a society or a nation in general (Kaplan & Baldauf Jr, 1997; Tollefson, 1991) whether it is national, local or foreign languages and at the microlevel, language planning decisions inform the classroom practice.

In the Indonesian school system, the English language curriculum has changed four times since 1975. The main reason for these changes is the continuing unsatisfactory results in students' English proficiency. The curriculum that applied from 1975-1984 was based on the traditional method where the focus of teaching and learning English was mainly on grammar. In 1984, the curriculum changed to a communicative approach which focused on communicative skills. The 1994 curriculum focused on an approach to meaning in specific contexts. In this approach meaning is the central focus of learning, not the grammar or structures. In 2001, Department of National Education issued Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi (Competence-based Curriculum). This curriculum is said as the more improved version of 1994 curriculum.

Thailand was considered the most suitable ASEAN country for this comparative study for two reasons. Firstly, Thailand has been running TEFL programs in primary schools for several years. Secondly, in terms of the status of English, both Thailand and Indonesia consider English as a *foreign language* whereas other ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines consider English as a *second language*, a legacy of British and the U.S. colonialization in those latter countries.

Historically, neither Indonesia nor Thailand had strong relationships with European countries where English is spoken. Thailand, for example has been conquered by the Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Burmese, while Indonesia has been colonised by the Dutch and Japanese. Thus, English has been chosen as the foreign language to be taught in formal education for communicative and academic reasons as well as economic reason rather than for historical reasons as shown in the following table.

Table 1. Foreign Language Programme in Indonesia and Thailand

	Indonesia	Thailand
<u>Foreign languages taught in:</u>		
Primary School	Only English as an optional subject	Only English as a compulsory subject
Junior High School	English as a compulsory subject	Idem
Senior High School	A wider range of foreign languages such as Germany, France, Japanese, Mandarin	Idem
Opportunities for using target language/s (TL)	Working in a foreign companies Working in a tourism field Able to communicate with foreigners, esp. those from the English-speaking countries Have more chances to study overseas Travelling	Working in a foreign companies Working in a tourism field Able to communicate with foreigners, esp. those from the English-speaking countries Have more chances to study overseas Travelling

Reasons why foreign language are taught in formal school	To establish relationships in any fields with foreign countries To access scientific, technological and economic development in global world	To establish relationships in any fields with foreign countries To access scientific, technological and economic development in global world
Status of indigenous languages in education	Only certain vernacular languages are taught, mostly in primary school	No support for languages other than Thai

This study was conducted to gather information regarding the implementation of language policy in the practice of teaching English in primary schools. Drawing from the policy documents and interview with the teachers and education experts in each country, I gathered data concerning the effects of language policy in the implementation of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) in primary school.

Research Design

Participants and data collection

To gather information relevant for this study, I formally interviewed three people. Two were from Thailand, one participant, was a primary school teacher and the other was from the Supervisory Unit, Office of the National Primary Education Commission (ONPEC) Ministry of Education in Bangkok. And one participant was from Indonesia who was a primary school teacher in Manado. The interviews were transcribed and translated into English when necessary. I

also used information which I noted down during informal conversation with colleagues in Thailand and Indonesia.

In my interviews with the participants, I asked them about the issues on TEFL and the implication of language policy in classroom practices. When I talked to personnel in ONPEC Ministry of Education in Bangkok, I was told about the plan of ONPEC regarding TEFL in primary schools throughout the country.

Besides interview, language policy documents especially for teaching English in primary school from Indonesia and Thailand were used as primary sources.

Results

Language policy generally defines how certain languages are treated in both national and educational contexts. Based on the data gathered, this section will present the language policies for teaching English in primary school used in Thailand and Indonesia.

Language policy in TEFL in Thailand

In Thailand, the national language and the official language is Thai. Thai is used widely at every level of the society, both for general communication and for academic purposes. As far as English is concerned, in Thailand, English is the first foreign language introduced in formal education. The history of English teaching in schools in Thailand started with the Royal Family, particularly in the King Rama IV era in the 18th century. At first, it was only members of the royal court who were given the opportunity to learn English. Gradually English has been introduced in formal education throughout the country. Since having foreign English teachers is expensive, Thailand is motivated to train Thai teachers to teach English.

In its development English is viewed as getting more important in Thailand, it is taught at all levels of formal education. To direct and to strengthen the

status of English as a foreign language, the government considers it important to have a policy which rules how it should be treated. Historically, the policy of teaching English in primary school has changed twice. English was first introduced nationally at the primary level as an elective subject in 1950s, and then in 1978 it became a compulsory subject taught from year 5: "Students in prathom (year) 5 and 6 are required to learn English" (*Guidelines for teaching English as a foreign language in Thailand (Nayobai karn sorn...)*, 1974). In 1996, the government launched a policy stating that English must be taught from year 1, as stated in the section of Education Reform at the Ministry of Education entitled Curriculum Reform: "Reforming the learning of foreign languages by providing access to English Language learning to first-grade primary pupils".

In the policy guidelines, the general goals in learning English in primary and secondary education are classified as follows:

1. To gain knowledge, understanding, and experience in various careers, according to students' ability and interest, and suitable adjustments in the area (local community).
2. To provide discipline in working, concentration, diligence, patience, economical, autonomy and an ability to interacting and socialising.
3. To be creative
4. To be able to get a job appropriate to their age.

(*Guidelines for teaching English as a foreign language in Thailand (Nayobai karn sorn...)*, 1974)

Besides the general goals, there are several aims for English teaching in primary schools which are more specific. They are as follows:

1. To gain understanding of grammatical rules of English.
2. To become competent in the four language skills.
3. To develop a positive attitude towards English and to enjoy reading to find information.
4. To be assisted in using English for communication.

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4. To be assisted in using English for communication.

These specific aims guide the curriculum for teaching and learning English. Looking at these aims, it seems that primary school pupils are expected to have an understanding of English grammar as well as the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Having attained these goals, it will then lead to having a positive attitude towards English and to getting information. The objectives for each language skill are also defined in these guidelines.

Based on the 1996 Education Reform, the outcome goals set up by the government after learning English for 2 years (year 1 and 2) are as follows:

1. Be able to respond in a simple way in English.
2. Be able to follow simple instruction.
3. Be able to pronounce the English alphabet and simple sentences.
4. Have a good attitude towards English.

These goals particularly apply to lower primary schools pupils when English was first introduced in year 1.

Language policy in TEFL in Indonesia

The rationale for introducing English to the primary school curriculum, according to the outline of teaching English in primary school (*Garis garis besar program pengajaran bidang studi Bahasa Inggris*, 1994) is as follow:

“Bahasa Inggris penting untuk tujuan penyerapan ilmu pengetahuan, teknologi dan seni budaya dan pembinaan hubungan dengan bangsa-bangsa lain” (*English important in order to absorb the world of science, technology and culture and to serve as a medium of international communication to establish relationships among nations*)

This was revised from the 1956 document about teaching EFL in formal education. The reason for the introduction of English to primary schools is to get worldwide information and to participate at an international level. However, as the document continues, “mata pelajaran bahasa Inggris merupakan mata

pelajaran alternatif mengingat ketersediaan tenaga pengajar, sarana-prasarana yang masih perlu dibina" (*English subject still serves as an alternative subject due to lack of teacher availability, facilities and resources, which still need to be developed*).

The general goals of teaching English in primary schools, according to the guidelines, are to

- (1) memberikan pengetahuan dasar Bahasa Inggris baik lisan maupun tulisan (*to give basic knowledge of spoken and written English*),
- (2) mengembangkan aspek keterampilan membaca, menyimak, menulis dan berbicara untuk kehidupan sehari-hari peserta didik (*to develop four language skills in the context of children's daily life*),
- (3) meningkatkan kesadaran melestarikan dan mengagungkan kebesaran Tuhan Yang Maha Esa (*to increase children's understanding of the nature of God, which basically means that language is a God-given gift to human beings*)

These goals should be understood and interpreted by the personnel in the educational field, including teachers who deal with children everyday in school. A clear understanding and an exact interpretation of the goals are important in order to be mindful of the functions of this subject, and to keep the activity of teaching English on the right track.

Besides general goals, there are also specific goals that define in more detail what to achieve. Every activity we do has its own specific goals including the teaching and learning process. The goals to attain are important to set up in the beginning, so we know which direction we are heading for. In Indonesia there are several specific goals, particularly for the local-content curriculum of English taught in primary school, as defined in Chapter One, Introduction, Guidelines of English Teaching Program in Primary School (1994), as follows:

1. Menumbuhkan rasa senang dan keberanian untuk mempelajari Bahasa Inggris melalui lagu-lagu sederhana. (*To develop feelings of happiness and courage by learning English through simple songs*)
2. Menanamkan kemampuan dasar berbahasa Inggris melalui pengenalan kosa kata yang sederhana. (*To implant the basic skills of English by introducing simple vocabulary*)
3. Melatih kemampuan berkomunikasi dengan menggunakan kalimat sederhana dalam percakapan sehari-hari. (*To develop the skill of communication by using simple sentences of daily conversation*)
4. Menumbuhkan kegemaran membaca buku-buku Bahasa Inggris yang sederhana. (*To enhance pupils' fondness for reading books written in simple English*)

Pada akhir sekolah dasar siswa memiliki ketrampilan membaca, menyimak, berbicara, dan menulis dalam pola sederhana berdasarkan tingkat perkembangan dan minat mereka dengan penguasaan kosakata lebih kurang 500 kata. (*At the end of primary school, the pupils are expected to have gained the four language skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking in a simple form based on their level of learning development and interest, and to master at least 500 words*)

The methods and techniques are then determined in accordance with the specific goals.

What does English teaching cover in primary school? In the policy document it is stated that it covers the development of vocabulary, listening-speaking (literally 'dialogue') and reading in an integrated way, with the emphasis mainly on proficiency in mastering vocabulary which relates to pupils' own lives. The microskills of language, such as structure, pronunciation and spelling, are taught to support the development of the four language skills

(known as macroskills) and not for the sake of mastering those macroskills only.

The following table summarizes the goals stated in the language policy of each country.

Table 2. General Goals in TEFL stated in Language Policy Documents

Indonesia	Thailand
To give basic knowledge of spoken and written English	To gain knowledge, understanding and experience in various careers, according to students' ability and interests and suitable adjustment in the area
To develop four language skills in the context of children's daily life	To provide discipline in working, concentration, diligence, patience, economical, autonomy and ability to interacting and socialising
To increase children's understanding of the nature of God, which basically means that languages is a God-given gift to human beings	To be creative
	To be able to get a job appropriate to their age.

Discussion

Thai EFL policy has been improved by lowering the starting age of introducing English in primary school since 1996. However, the general goals of policy does not change much except the addition of what to expect after learning English from year one. According to the 1974 Policy Document, "English in prathom (year) 5 and 6 is a compulsory subject which focuses on both knowledge and the skills to communicate properly" and for those in year 1 and 2, the focus is more on listening skills, followed by speaking skills. Thus,

pronunciation is considered important for early learning as it requires good listening and speaking. Basically, this is according to the idea put forward by key writers in early language learning such as Finocchiaro (1964), Freudenstein (1979), Stern (1967), Littlewood (1984) who state that listening and speaking skills are appropriate for young children to acquire.

If we look at the policy statements especially the goals for EFL programmes in primary schools (see Table 3), many interpretations are possible. This actually opens the opportunity to develop creativity. However, the condition is not quite supportive because Thailand still has a centralised education system which makes this less possible. The policy statement is also supported with a pathway which determines the topic and guides the teachers in arranging the teaching process, unlike the Indonesian EFL goals of policy for primary school which stated clearly what should be achieved after learning English for certain periods in primary schools. For example, it sounds simple, but it is easy to understand and to measure later on that 'at the end of primary school, the pupils are expected to ... master at least 500 words' (*Garis garis besar program pengajaran bidang studi Bahasa Inggris*, 1994). The limitation is good in one side, especially Indonesia has just introduced TEFL in primary school for a relatively short time, however, it is suggested to improve the policy as it develops over time. Together with the policy, there is also teaching program which explains the topic and activities in class.

The main reason for teaching English in schools in Indonesia and Thailand is more or less the same. It is the same because for both countries English is seen as the language for wider communication and also for accessing up-to-date information in science and technology. There is a slight difference between them because Thai primary school pupils are expected to have knowledge of grammar as well as language skills to support their future career, while in Indonesia, the expectation for primary school pupils learning English is to increase their familiarity towards this language and to implant the basic skills of English in a simple way.

Thailand

As explained previously, the policy of teaching English in primary school has been implemented since 1978, however students' proficiency in the English language in Thailand is still unsatisfactory. My investigation shows many learners and administrators were dissatisfied with the level of competence reached (Liando, 1999).

Table 3. English Language Teaching Goals in Primary School

Indonesia	Thailand
To develop feeling of happiness and bravery by learning English through simple songs	To gain an understanding of the grammatical rules of English
To implant the basic skills of English by introducing simple vocabulary	To become competent in the four language skills
To develop the skills of communication by using simple sentences of daily conversation	To develop a positive attitude towards English and to enjoy reading to find information
To enhance pupils' fondness in reading books written in simple English.	To be assisted in using English for communication
At the end of primary school, the pupils are expected to have gained the four language skills in a simple form based on their level of learning development and interest and to master at least 500 words.	

They said that even after graduating from high school (having learnt English for 8 years in school if they started at year 5 primary school) most students

still found it difficult to speak the language. What should be questioned is what causes this problem. The major problem which caused this dissatisfaction is the discrepancy between the goals in the curriculum, the teaching practice and the needs of the students. For example, those who want to proceed to tertiary education may need more developed reading skills than other skills in order to be able to read textbooks which are mostly written in English, or to get information from abroad. On the other hand, those who prefer to work in companies that have close ties with foreign companies, or engage in work which has more contact with foreigners may need communication skills more than other skills.

Another factor is that the methods and techniques used in teaching English are not compatible with the goals. For example, if communication is the target, the material taught to the students does not provide communicative situation, instead it mainly focuses on grammar. Moreover, it does not create a climate which is conducive to motivate students to speak. A simple example is the entrance test to university which focuses mostly on grammar.

Since 1996, English has been introduced in year one primary school. The basic consideration for early introduction is pronunciation. In the EFL context, English pronunciation is a problem encountered by Thai students whose mother tongue is Thai. I found that they showed many influences of their mother tongue when speaking English. It is mainly because Thai is a tonal language. Many studies show that tonal language speakers encounter difficulties when learning or speaking non-tonal languages like English. Brown (1976, p.70) explored the dominance of this aspect of Thai over English and stated that "but whatever the cause might be, the facts are clear: Thai is stronger than English in the battle of sounds". The problem of pronunciation has been addressed in part by the government's new policy: "reforming the learning of foreign languages by providing access to English Language learning to first-grade primary pupils" (Education Reform 1996). This decision is in line with the study of young children learning a new language which is generally accepted

that pronunciation is best acquired before the age of nine Bergentoft (1994, p.33) states that "if the teaching of foreign languages begins early enough the acquisition of good pronunciation is facilitated". Singleton (1989), as far as foreign language learning is concerned, presented studies conducted in the United States showing that children scored better than adults in English pronunciation.

Interestingly, many children from the southern part of Thailand whose mother tongue is Malay-Thai, known as Dawi do not face the problem in pronouncing English words as much as students whose mother tongue is Thai. Based on my observation when I visited primary schools in Pattani (south of Thailand), in Nakornphatom (central of Thailand) and in Khon Khaen (northeast of Thailand), the pronunciation problem is less in southern Thailand. This applies especially to certain sounds such as strong /r/. This happens because Dawi, the language most spoken in south Thailand and English are not tonal languages while Thai is. Bialystok and Hakuta (1994, pp.85-86) state that one can learn a second language that is similar to one's native language more quickly than one that is different. In contrast to children whose mother tongue is Thai, children who speak Dawi as their first language have to study harder in school compared because they have to study two languages other than their own, Thai and English.

Indonesia

A decade has gone since the 1994 curriculum was first introduced in primary schools. Since its implementation, several problems have been recognised such as lack of qualified teachers, lack of resources, and lack of facilities. Most teachers teaching English in primary school have no English background. Only well-known private schools and certain public schools can afford teachers with English background to teach. There are a few resources available but they are, certainly, insufficient for EFL program in primary school

and so are the facilities. Therefore, only certain primary schools in the cities implement English teaching to the pupils. Ironically, many well-known private and several public primary schools in big cities throughout Indonesia taught English long before the government's policy launch. They usually start with year 3 students and some even start from year 1. Having English teaching in primary schools has an impact on a school's prestige in society. There is a trend for these rich schools to be considered 'better'. Indeed, this phenomenon does attract parents to send their children to primary schools which offer English.

Lack of qualified English teachers is the dominant problem faced by Indonesian primary schools. Even secondary schools require more English teachers. The decision to place English in primary schools as an elective subject is considered wishful thinking at this stage, taking into account this major problem. However, efforts are being made to eventually improve the quality of English language teaching regardless of the low financial support. In-service training for English teachers is being held every semester, with a limited number of English teachers attending. This aims to enhance teachers' capability and performance in teaching English especially to young learners. However, to run this program properly requires funding and this seems to be another problem since funding is not easy to get.

Resources and materials are another problem that needs to be taken into account. Although some textbooks for teaching English in primary schools have been published, the content of the books does not really accommodate primary school pupils' reading ability. Through my observations and interviews with English teachers in Manado, one of many problems they face is lack of sources of English-based songs. Songs are interesting for children because they bring fun and joy to them. To cope with this lack of teaching materials, several Indonesian children's songs which are familiar to children have been translated into English.

Other complaint put forward by teachers was about students' English competence. Most of them say that the students do not have a positive

attitude towards English. Only those who are really interested in English are successful and those who are not are left behind. Dardjowidjojo (1998) notes that, despite the number of years allocated to learning English, the result has not been encouraging. He stated that "the majority of Indonesians, including many highly educated language scholars, do not master English well enough to absorb scientific materials written in English" (Dardjowidjojo, 1998, p.45). Teachers also complaint about the huge administrative tasks that must be fulfilled such as preparing lesson plan according to the format for every class although the classes are parallel, a teacher must make each lesson plan for each of these parallel class, annual

programs, quarterly programs, analyse of the material, teaching plans, and work sheets. The teacher I interviewed argued that these tasks consume much of their time, cutting into lesson preparation time. The centralised curriculum is also another problem in that it stifles teachers' creativity. Based on various resources including my own experience, students complain about various matters relating to learning English, such as:

1. English is difficult to learn (regarding methods and/or techniques as well as the subject matter itself)
2. unfriendly teachers,
3. structure-oriented lessons,
4. limited time scheduled.

Providing standard teaching facilities, including foreign language teaching-learning aids, is necessary to support teachers and students in teaching and learning process. There has been progress in providing language laboratories to support the development of listening and speaking skills, but unfortunately these are still limited to certain public schools or private schools that can afford it.

Referring to Thailand that have implemented FL long before Indonesia has, the problems occur are similar. They are lack of qualified teacher

including lack of language proficiency of the TL they teach, lack of resources and facilities. Considering these problems, I think it is fair in Indonesian not to introduce English as a compulsory subject in primary schools until the problems have found the solution, otherwise it would not produce a satisfactory result. Furthermore Thailand and Indonesia need to consider some aspects such as giving more freedom to schools and teachers to develop the EFL program based on the available resources and the environment. In a larger scale, decentralised education system is also important to be considered for application in Indonesian and Thailand due to more demanding, democratic and liberal education. It also opens more opportunity for improvements and creativity and to maximally use the local resources.

Closing remarks

Most language policy is a top-down product, meaning that it comes from the government. Although contributions are made by a number of experts before a language policy is launched, sometimes the policy does not really meet the needs of the society. This study highlights several important notes regarding language policy and its implication in foreign language teaching in primary schools. Language policy is best to be a bottom-up process. The bottom-up process means that the formulation of policy must consider the real needs of society. After the policy has been implemented, it is very important to conduct evaluation in order to get feedback to improve the policy decisions (Kaplan & Baldauf Jr, 1997, pp. 37, 92, 135).

In implementing teaching English program in primary schools, having a clear goal is essential but not sufficient, as in practice there are many factors which appear to obstruct the on-going process. This means that even though the goals of learning have been prescribed in the policy they must be supplemented with instructions of how to attain such goals or the material

of teaching which is used to achieve the goals. Goals of policy influence the classroom practices, for example if communication is the goal, the practices in classroom will employ activities which encourage the communication skills as do the materials and the teaching methods. Therefore, all influential factors should be well considered when designing a foreign language policy as this will impact on the practices.

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