

# Achieving English Language Proficiency and Its Dilemma in English

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## Achieving English Language Proficiency and Its Dilemma in English Language Teaching in Indonesia

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### Abstract

The implication of the rapid technological changes for English learners in Indonesia is Indonesian learners must be able to master English proficiency to compete in the new world of work, and secure their intended job in the industrial revolution. Double curricula, KTSP and 2103 in some schools especially junior high schools are still being implanted causing teachers' confusion. Those that applying the 2013 curriculum also face many problems in terms of learning hour reduction, teachers' less competence, unsupported learning environment, complicated assessment, and poor learning outcomes consequently, achieving students' English proficiency is yet a heavy task for teachers. The EPI (English Proficiency index) data show Indonesia ranked 32nd out of 72 countries in the 2016 with average score 52.15 (low proficiency), and 51<sup>st</sup> out of 88 countries in 2018 with average score 51.58 (low proficiency level). Since the goal setting and practices are all interwoven to increase student performance, to meet the aims of English proficiency in ELT, government needs to relook curriculum to promote students learning based on the learners need analysis. In-service teacher training must be held continuously to improve teachers' English proficiency level and competences as Indonesia continues to develop, improving English language skills both spoken and written,

**Keywords:** industrial revolution, double curricula, 2013 curriculum, ELT

### Introduction

As developing country, Indonesia is trying to make a good progress in terms of economy, politics, science, and technology. The use of English becomes influential in the country development. English affects individual literacy acquisition to gain new skills, knowledge, and ways of interacting with other cross-cultural social groups.

A number of reasons are worth paying attention to the fact that English is important and it has significant impacts on individual career, as job vacancies across countries require English. People who master English will have higher salary and have better opportunities.



11 Recently, Indonesia's Ministry of Industry has designed 'Making Indonesia 4.0' where information and communication technology is fully utilized. The government urges education institutions to cooperate in improving the quality of Indonesia's human resources in supporting the development of the fourth industrial revolution. Improving education is a part of President Joko Widodo's plan to invest in human resources. University graduate needs to aware of the changes in the economic system and the fast development of technology.

The latest technology development is Chinese firm Huawei to deploy the superfast network 5G promising increased data speeds that change people's interaction with the internet, help to connect rural communities, and improve everything from healthcare to tourism infrastructure. The rapid technological advancement makes Indonesia should change the policy to keep up the development. The implication of the rapid technological changes for English learners in Indonesia is Indonesian learners must be able to master English proficiency to compete in the new world of work, and secure their intended job in the industrial revolution 4.0.

The aim of teaching English is a means to keep up with the development of science and technology (Dardjowidjojo, 2003). English is widely used for digital tools to stay connected to community members, and collaboratively work with and understand information across countries. Indonesian government has acknowledged the importance of English language since its independence day. Therefore, English becomes a compulsory subject in secondary schools (Nurkamto, 2003), but English language as official foreign language remains steady (Lie, 2007). It is used mostly in the classroom. It is even very common to see students speak Bahasa Indonesia in classroom interaction where English is being taught. Students speaking another language distract other English learners. However, there are certainly arguments to be made for allowing students to communicate in other languages, especially if they are beginners.

Based on the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 060/U/1993 dated 25 February 1993 and the 1989 Constitution on the System of National Education, the final goal of teaching English for students at schools is to achieve proficiency in English in the globalization era (Rachmajanti, 2008). Meanwhile, the aim of the teaching of English in the schools has been to develop the students' communicative competence that would help the students in their university education (Nurkamto, 2003). It is interesting to know how practices actually meet the goals. The goal setting and practices are all interwoven and they impact each other to increase student performance.

Teaching English as a foreign language is not the same as teaching English as the second language as it happens in Philippines and Singapore therefore it will be more challenging to meet the goals of teaching English as a foreign language. Indonesian learners use their mother tongue in daily communication. It means the environment does not support the learning process in which they are less exposed to the English language. Furthermore, the reduction of time allocation in 2013 curriculum worsens the condition. The government policy seems contradictory with the aims of ELT. How Indonesian learners are able to attain good English proficiency to face the industrial revolution seems very dilemmatic. This paper discusses English proficiency seized by Indonesians students and its dilemma in achieving it.

### Government Policy in English Language Teaching

Indonesian curricula have experienced ten times changes. They are; they are the 1945, 1952, 1964, 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, 2004, and 2006 called KTSP curriculum (ekagurunesama, 2012). The latest is 2013 curriculum.

In 2006 School Based Curriculum (KTSP), individual school is to develop its curriculum based on Standard Competence and Basic Competence set by the National Ministry of Education and Culture. Individual school provides wide authority and scopes to schools to undertake and develops the curriculum in accordance with the circumstances, potential, and needs of the region, as well as the condition of students (See Ministerial Regulation No 23 Year 2006).

Meanwhile, the 2013 curriculum applies a scientific approach as its basic learning approach and has three aspects of assessment. They are knowledge aspects, skills aspects, attitudes and behavior aspects. Some changes have emerged in standard content made by the Ministry of Education in the 2013 Curriculum: (1) removal of English as a subject from elementary school, (2) reduction of teaching hours at senior high school, (3) reduction of contents of teaching materials (types of text and speech activities), (5) limitation of topics of discussion, (6) explicit addition of grammar points, (7) integration of all language skills, and (8) reduction of teachers' duties in material and curriculum development (Putra, 2014).

Just two years after the implementation of the 2004 curriculum, a new curriculum was created, the 2006 KTSP curriculum, well known as the School Based Curriculum. However, the KTSP curriculum was also revised by the 2013 curriculum. Two years later, in 2015, the Ministry of Education announced that the 2013 curriculum should be re-evaluated. To deal with that, some schools are back to the KTSP curriculum, and others are still using the 2013 curriculum.



In the consequences of the Ministry of Education policy, many schools especially Junior high schools in Indonesia have still implemented double curricula, KTSP and 2103 curriculum. There are many criticism about the implementation since it creates teachers' confusion. Implementing a different curriculum is clearly violating the principle of equity in terms of education (Nugraheni, 2015). The different curriculum as the basic teaching approach impacts differently, so every citizen does not have the same right to obtain the same education input of the same level of educations. Furthermore, another impact of dual curricula is teachers and schools are busy preparing complicated administrative and teaching materials and tools for the different curriculum.

### Challenging on the Changing Curriculum in English Language Teaching

Teachers' role is one of deciding factors related to the curriculum. Successful curriculum implementation is closely related to teachers' role in its facilitation. Teachers should be able to apply the curriculum well-adjusted to the learning environment (school characteristics, local needs, cultural background). Teachers' responsibility is to be able to engage in curricular decisions such as understanding the content of the curriculum, planning activities, and assessment based on the curriculum focus, as well as matching content with several standards on the curriculum syllabus (Handler, 2010). Since Teacher has an influential role in relation to the curriculum, it is necessary to comprehend teachers' voices and perspectives on the implementation of a curriculum.

Study found that many of English teachers in have difficulty in instructional technology, curriculum implementation, methods of teaching, and teaching materials (Alwasilah, 2013). Instructional technology is considered the weakest area to improve, and it constitutes teachers' exhaustion to speed up their competence to keep up the rapid changing of technology. Moreover, the EFL teachers hardly get opportunity to join professional development programs (Sundayana, 2012) such as EFL training. They are either permanent teachers or part time teachers. In fact, teachers' proficiency level affects significant influence in how a classroom operates and teaches students to address specific learning standards of which describes the knowledge and skills students are expected to acquire.

The challenge comes from the students as well. It is also formidable for teachers to change students' mind set to be active learners especially those in the rural area. The 2013 curriculum demands students as the center of the teaching learning process in the classroom not the teachers. Indonesian students' cultural background belongs to high context culture forming them reluctantly express their opinion or ideas. They tend to be more silent or avoid speaking explicitly in delivering the message in front of the public. It is tough task for teachers in teaching English.



Although the 2013 curriculum is believed to be better than the previous curriculum because the scientific approach used in the curriculum involving the processes of observing, questioning, exploring, associating, and communicating are expected to promote students to have critical, analytic, investigational, procedural and communicative competences forms students critical thinking (Alwasilah: 2012). Yet the reality shows that most high school learners can hardly use English in the real world even for simple purposes. It is also far below the nationally set standards of English Competence.

It is unavoidable that the implementation of a new curriculum always causes more pressure on the educational institution as well as on the teacher (Sahirudin, 2013). Teachers give more attention to the new since teachers need to learn and prepare new lesson plans and teaching materials. The reduction of time allocation in 2013 curriculum adds more burdens for teachers to achieve English language teaching goals and it is difficult and challenging to meet the standard competences stated in the lesson plan. Most of English learners in Indonesia, they are passive learners. Teachers become the source of knowledge. It creates fundamental challenge in applying the curriculum.

Assessment is another challenge in the 2013 curriculum encountered by teachers since authentic assessment has been implemented in Curriculum 2013. The scoring criteria are rather complicated, it do not only focus on cognitive aspect, but also the personality aspect. The authentic assessment is an assessment requiring students to use the same competencies, or combinations of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, they need to apply in the criterion situation in professional life (Ariev, 2005; Gulikers, Bastiaens, & Kirschner, 2004; Lombardi, 2008).

As stated in the Regulation of the Minister of Culture and Education of the Republic of Indonesia Number 104 Year 2014 (Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2014). There are four competencies measured in the authentic assessment, they are spiritual and social attitude, knowledge, and skill. The teachers' lack of competencies in carrying out the assessment creates more problems and affects the effectiveness of 2013 curriculum implementation in English language teaching. Teachers have few difficulties in assessing knowledge but have more difficulties in attitude assessment since the teachers do not fully understand it. Consequently, measuring language proficiency achieved by students is questionable if the indicators are their scores.



Learning environment or learning condition is also very challenging. English in Indonesia is neither the mother tongue nor the official language. It is taught as a foreign language. Learning condition is influential to gain the students' highest level of proficiency in English. Indonesian learners have less exposure. Exposure to the language is limited to the school context in very few hours per week; the teachers are generally nonnative of the English language, and there is no communicative need to use the L2 outside the classroom. This situation becomes very problematic.

### Research Method

This paper examined the function of documents as a data source in qualitative research. It was used as the main method of data collection and analysis. There were 9 various journals of English language teaching in 2017 and 2018 had been read, observed and analyzed. (Bowen, 2009) stated document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic. Gathering of facts through document analysis is not an easy endeavor therefore in depth document analysis was used appropriately to explore the belief, context factors, practices of English teachers that led exemplarily to gain a rich understanding of English language teaching in Indonesia.

### Discussion

Teachers' readiness to adopt 2013 curriculum need to be developed. Teachers are demanded to know more than core subjects do, but to integrate digital technology effectively and efficiently in English language teaching in industrial revolution 4.0 and even in superfast network 5G eras. Integrating technology in the classroom developing knowledge and skills in digital media is obligation, and developing new understandings, new approaches, new roles, new forms of professional development, and new attitudes about technology integration supporting language proficiency level.

Indonesians are still English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, and they do not have a lot of opportunity to practice English. Students still use Bahasa Indonesia and local languages in every aspect of daily life distract their language proficiency achievement. The use of English at school in a very limited time allocation is therefore of fundamental importance since it is the only means by which the Indonesian government can guarantee that their citizens are learning English.

In addition, The EPI (English Proficiency index) data show Indonesia ranked 32nd out of 72 countries in the 2016 with average score 52.15 falls under category of low proficiency (Renandya, et.al., 2018) and 51<sup>st</sup> out of 88 countries in 2018 with average score 51.58 falls still on low proficiency category ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EF\\_](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EF_)



English\_Proficiency\_Index). The decreasing average score by 0.57 points proves Indonesian learners need to work hard to achieve better result that must be supported by government policy in ELT as English has become more and more important since it is now not only subject as a prerequisite to enter higher education but also as the gateway to global opportunities.

Having long discussion above, English teaching in Indonesia suffers a lot in meeting the high level of English proficiency. Other factors such as time constraints, knowledge and skills, facilities, and IT have a big contribution toward the successful ELT.

### Conclusion and Suggestions

Indonesian government's policy in curriculum creates teachers' confusion in implementing it. Learning hour reduction, complicated and time consuming, unsupported learning environment, teachers' low competence are still the main problems causing the low English proficiency level achieved by students. Those have contributed English proficiency level in Indonesia falls under low proficiency category. However, finding the perfect curriculum is likely impossible. The diversity of learning styles and student personalities in a classroom practical<sup>21</sup> guarantees that there is no one-size-fits-all lesson plan or content. To meet the aims of English language teaching in Indonesia, government needs to relook and refine curriculum to promote students learning based on the learners need analysis.

Creating the best situation to ensure that student learning is promoted when curriculum is less than ideal is better to do to help students enjoy the learning process. Selecting which lesson's components need to be taught due to time concern is also important to reduce the problem of low proficiency level of high school student<sup>17</sup> by constructing opportunities for simple communication in English lesson since getting students to use English in the classroom is one of the biggest challenges of teaching.

Government needs to provide regular training opportunities to improve teachers' competences<sup>24</sup> to overcome the problem. The training is not only about English language but also the use of technology in the classroom. The best way to move towards achieving this is to ensure that government is committed to providing top quality teacher training.

Since this paper provides only a basic introduction to English language teaching in Indonesia, additional sources and further research related to ELT in Indonesia to expand needed to offer additional perspectives.





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