

ENGLISH TEACHING AND “RSBI” SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Bilingual education programs in Indonesia are becoming popular and many parents are very keen on sending their children to these bilingual classes. Bilingual classes which are offered by many schools, which usually have the label of RSBI or SBI have not been running without criticisms. Critics ask about the effectiveness of the bilingual learning. Questions are also raised about the issues of high rates of school fee and the English competence of the teachers. Nevertheless, parents believe that bilingual classes can provide their children with better education because these classes are equipped with better facilities and technologies and more qualified teachers. Then, what can be the trend of the bilingual classes in the future?

Key-words: bilingual, bilingual classes, RSBI/SBI, English

What so called bilingual school or class is now becoming popular among parents who hope to get better education for their children. More and more parents registering their children to enter these bilingual classes which more and more schools are offering to meet this increasing “demand.”

Bilingual classes are usually offered by a school which has been appointed to be an RSBI (Rintisan Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional) or SBI (Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional). However, some schools which are not RSBI or SBI are also offering bilingual classes, and they are always looked forward to by many parents. According to UU No. 20/2003 (Sistem Pendidikan Nasional) each municipal must have at least one school to be an SBI (Article 50 Verse 3). This requires the local government (lit. Dinas Pendidikan) to choose one school or more which has met some certain criteria set up by the Ministry of Education.

There are some questions that should be raised about this bilingual education. These questions are (1) what is actually bilingual education, (2) why parents want their children to go to the bilingual classes, (3) the problems with bilingual education, and (4) what will this kind of education look like in the future? This article attempts to answer these questions. This article is summarized from many different sources.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION OF RSBI/SBI

What is actually a bilingual education program, and why was it established? Bilingual education is the practice of teaching the core subjects in at least two different languages as the media of instruction (Subadi, 2009). In bilingual education where English is used as a second or foreign language, the students

are taught math and sciences in the foreign language and social studies in their native language (Williams, 2009).

Now then, why is this bilingual education is implemented? In the Indonesian context, the purpose of this program is to improve the quality of the human resources to compete in the global era. We have already realized that education in Indonesia is not as good as that in other countries, even the ASEAN countries. According to the report of *Monitoring Global Report* issued by the UNESCO in 2005, Indonesia was the 10th of 14 developing countries in Asia-Pacific area, and the first rank was Thailand. A survey of *World Competitiveness Year Book 2007*, Indonesia ranked 53 among 55 countries being surveyed. Thus, the quality of human resources is still very low, and this has become the concern of the Ministry of Education.

For this reason, the Ministry of Indonesia launched a Government Regulation (PP) 19/2005 about the National Standard of Education in which each municipal must have at least one international school as stated in Article 61 Verse (1):

“Pemerintah bersama-sama pemerintah daerah menyelenggarakan sekurang-kurangnya satu satuan pendidikan pada jenjang pendidikan dasar dan sekurang-kurangnya satu satuan pendidikan pada jenjang pendidikan menengah untuk dikembangkan menjadi satuan pendidikan bertaraf internasional.”

This PP covers eight key standards which are the standards of (1) content, (2) process, (3) competency of graduates, (4) educators and educational human resources, (5) facilities, (6) management, (7) financing, and (8) educational evaluation.

These standards are parts of the requirement that a school should meet to be labeled as an RSBI or SBI. When these are not met they are required to improve themselves to meet the requirements. To enrich the requirements, the curriculum for the RSBI or SBI should refer to the one which has been roughly outlined in the PP and to the curriculum adopted from the education system of a developed country. By doing this, it is hoped that the graduates will have better qualification and can continue their study to a school or university overseas.

The main purpose of the RSBI/SBI is to develop awareness toward the importance of continuous learning and better achievement due to the changing and developing sciences and different cultures. The teacher of RSBI/SBI are designed to be a figure who understands well the meaning of learning concepts such as deep-learning, higher order thinking skills, and contextual learning and knows well different characteristics of his/her students (Fahriza, 2009). The students are eventually led to develop independent learning, responsibility, cooperation with other students, honesty, and tolerance. With these they can be better human resources who can compete globally.

PARENTS' EXPECTATIONS

RSBI or SBI seems to have become a magnet to many parents who want to register their children to these schools. They have the understanding that these schools are more qualified than the regular ones. They may be right about this but is it because these schools use English as the language of instruction? Or are there other reasons for entering these schools.

There are several pieces of eminence, which make RSBI or SBI better than the regular schools. Some of them are described here.

- 1) The use of English as a medium of instruction in the classroom can improve the students' mastery of English. Though there have been debates over this issue, it still attracts many parents.
- 2) With enough fund from the government and high rates of school fee the school can improve the facilities for the teaching-learning process. Most of the RSBI or SBI classrooms are equipped with LCD projectors, or television sets with DVD or VCD players. The laboratories are also renewed with more sophisticated tools or machines. This can eventually improve the quality of the teaching-learning process where IT is applied in the classes.
- 3) The requirements set for RSBI or SBI by the government require the schools to improve all things related to the school management and the learning. The eight national standards make the

schools to fix everything, which will eventually also change the mindset of the teachers and educational staff. It, of course, will increase the quality of the schools.

- 4) The adoption and/or adaptation of the curriculum and teaching-learning methodologies from a developed country make the graduates possible to achieve international standard of education. As a result they may continue their study overseas to any school or university which has similar standards.

Despite the four advantages above, more issues about RSBI/SBI can be added to the list. Prestige is one of them. Parents feel to have more prestige when their children can go to RSBI/SBI, sometimes not considering the cost that they have to pay.

PROBLEMS WITH RSBI OR SBI

The implementation of RSBI or SBI has not been successful without criticisms. Many criticisms have been expressed by people of many different professions, from the students themselves to experts of education. The following are some points of the problem which are summarized from many different references.

Some of the problems with the bilingual program (lit. RSBI or SBI) that follow the birth of this program can be listed as follows:

1. The government, through the Ministry of Education, seems to make the program as to meet the requirements that have been stated in the national act (lit. Undang-undang), and they did not look carefully at the readiness of the schools to do the program. This could have made the program not run well because it was not prepared well either.
2. The schools, on the other hand, accept to do the program because of the finance that they will get when they do it even though they might not be ready and do not have enough facilities to meet the requirements.
3. In practice, the local government (lit. municipal education agency) tends to distribute the opportunity evenly to the schools without looking at the quality of those schools. Usually it prioritizes the state schools, not private ones though they are better.
4. The school fees of RSBI and SBI are so high that only rich parents will be able to send their children to these schools. For this reason the abbreviation RSBI is frequently slipped to be "Rintihan Sekolah Bertarif International (lit. a moan for an international school fee).
5. According to Santoso (2010) the RSBI or SBI schools are not well implemented and organized. The person(s) in charge are not able to complete

the reports which are needed for evaluation. From all RSBI or SBIs in Indonesia (136 SDs, 300 SMPs, 320 SMAs and 118 SMKs), there were 139 schools last year which could not complete the report on time. It may show that when these schools are not well organized, their quality may deteriorate.

Furthermore, according to Pillai (2005), the problems with the bilingual schools are as the following. Though his opinions are not related directly to RSBI or SBI in the Indonesian context, they may be applicable to this kind of school. There are five points that he raises.

1. The system of bilingual education requires special teachers with certain criteria of competence and special classrooms with certain facilities to facilitate learning. This causes gaps between the teachers and different treatment and facilities which as a result causes social gaps amongst the students, teachers, and parents.
2. The bilingual education program in the USA eventually increased the drop-out rates. The bilingual program was unsuccessful which resulted in 35% rate of drop out. This makes people feel that this rate doesn't justify the costs involved in providing bilingual education.
3. Bilingual education requires a number of trained teachers who are proficient in both English and their native language, in which English is one of the mediums of instruction in most cases. However, the available number of these teachers is not equal to the demand. In Indonesia, many teachers were not brave enough to teach in the bilingual classes.
4. As mentioned previously, the bilingual program requires special classrooms that can accommodate the bilingual learning. In the teaching and learning process the students and the teachers are expected to use optimally the facilities which can facilitate the use of the second or foreign language.
5. Bilingual program requires a lot of money for the facilities which are needed. These include the development of the curriculum, the materials, the classroom equipment, etc. Nevertheless, the schools do not usually have enough money to afford them. School fees are not enough, thus government funding is very necessary.

THE FUTURE OF RSBI OR SBI

What will this kind of education be like in the future? Looking at the advantages and disadvantages of these schools, parents will still choose them as the place for their children to study, regardless the high school fees that they have to pay. In spite of the disadvantages mentioned earlier, the schools are

developing to achieve all objectives that have been set up by the government.

This kind of school will still be implemented until the government of Indonesia finds that the quality of human resources is better than or at least equal to that of ASEAN countries. The quality of Indonesian human resources should be continuously improved as required by the relevant legal acts; therefore, RSBI or SBI will be continuously implemented and improved along the way. With the government financial support the schools will be able to make progressive improvement.

At the earlier stage of the establishment of RSBI/SBI problems and constraints may have existed along the way, but as it is progressing and developing these problems and constraints are solved and eliminated. Better design and format of the teaching-learning process will also be achieved which leads to better accomplishment of the objectives of the schools.

When RSBI or SBIs can eventually provide significant evidence that they are qualified schools, parents will keep sending their children to the schools.

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