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TOO DIFFICULT TO REACH: A CASE STUDY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TEACHING-LEARNING WITH ENGLISH IN INDONESIA'S INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SCHOOLS

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The fast changing world and global interconnectedness have led to many changes which have impacted on education. To name a few, schools in developed countries face many challenges conforming to standards-based reform, public accountability, school based management, and digital technologies (Hopkins and Jackson, 2003). Such situations have made governments in developing countries, including Indonesia, take initiatives by imposing policies on their school system to keep the educational sector in line with the global challenge.

Meanwhile in Indonesia, significant change to educational sector followed the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998 and devolution of responsibilities to provincial and district administrations. This can be seen in the fourth Constitutional Amendments which stipulated that at least 20 percent of state

budget be allocated for education; and the new education system regulation (Law 20/2003) that emphasized educational decentralization. The law, among others, stipulates that local governments have to develop at least one school that has 'international standard'. In accordance with the law, the Indonesian Ministry of National Education, backed with available funds based on the new state constitution, proposed an International Standard School (or *Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional*, *SBI in Indonesian term*) program in which hundreds of schools have participated from 2006 (Martiyanti, 2008).

Objectives to improve capacity-building within a school under a program such as SBI should be welcome. The developing country context is salient and unique, especially when it is analysed as a complexity of school improvement level. The focus of the article is to understand more about school capacity building issues particularly in the component of knowledge, skills and disposition of individual staff, and professional learning community in a school in Indonesia.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEWS

The intended outcome of most education policies is to improve students' achievement. Extensive research about students' achievement by Hattie (2002) found that teachers are the main contributor to students' success when they provide good quality in curriculum, instructional method and assessment in the classroom. These qualities cannot be separated within organizational perspectives which depend on school capacity where teachers are expected to carry out their roles effectively (King and Newman, 2001). According to Harris (2001, p. 261) school capacity "is concerned with creating the conditions, opportunities and experience for collaboration and mutual learning". This shows that teachers' effort and initiatives in teaching and learning cannot be separated to what happen at the school level.

King and Newman (2001: 88) proposed more operational

terms to be incorporated in school capacity. They have included the school's collective competency to implement effective change, where the three core components are:

- i. Knowledge, skills and dispositions of individual staff members;
- ii. A professional learning community in which staff work collaboratively to set clear goals for student learning, assess how well students are doing, develop action plans to increase student achievement, whilst being engaged in inquiry and problem solving
- iii. Program coherence – the extent to which school's programmes for student and staff learning are coordinated, focused on clear learning goals and sustained over a period of time

Moreover, Hopkins and Jackson (2003) emphasize that the first two components of school capacity relate to human and social capital, where relationship is strengthened and continually developing to make individual staff member to actualize his or her knowledge and skills. Harris (2001) focuses on building school capacity that promotes collaboration, empowerment and inclusion. He (p. 261) added that inclusion relates to the reality where so many innovation ideas are coming, but school institutions can be most effective when they are not "those [who] take on the most innovations, but those that are able to integrate, align and coordinate innovations into their own focussed programmes".

Research that is related to school capacity in England has shown the importance of outside school support as a pre-requisite in the context of Local Education Authority (Harris, 2001) and Hadfield's National College for School Leadership (Hopkins & Jackson, 2003). It is consistent with the framework proposed by King and Newman (2001) which states that policies and programs from a school superior's agency (district, state or national government) on curriculum, professional development, school accountability and students' assessment will affect school. It is also

important to look closely into policy initiative and its implementation in order to review how it can become “enabling conditions that allow process to affect product” (Stringer, 2009: p.165).

1.3 RECENT DEVELOPMENT OF INDONESIAN EDUCATION AND SBI POLICY BRIEF

The debacle of Soeharto’s government in 1998, radically overthrow centralised manner that was practiced since the Dutch colonial regime. Based on the autonomy law, education sector together with other public sectors are managed at district level starting from year 2001. The government has implemented subsequent reforms in the national school system with regards to school management, curriculum, education financing, final examination, community participation, and teacher certification (Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006; Raihani, 2007; Fitriah, 2010; Raihani & Sumintono, 2010).

In terms of school management, the government introduced a program called School-Based Quality Improvement Management (SBQIM) which targets 700 junior secondary and senior secondary schools across Indonesia (Umaedy, 1999). Schools which were interested to join SBQIM had to submit a school development plan and if accepted, the central office allocated a block grant as ‘seed money’ called quality improvement operational assistance or BOMM (*bantuan operasional manajemen mutu*) to the school to cover a portion of the total operational cost of the quality improvement program (Subijanto, 2000; Indriyanto, 2003). There are two reports available related to these efforts (Subijanto, 2000; Depdiknas, 2001) which show that all schools which emphasised enhancement of the academic achievements of their students relied on extra teaching activities for students who would face national examinations.

The central government in 2006 initiated the International Standard School program based on the New Educational System

Law (article 50, paragraph 3) which stated clearly that the government and/or local government has to establish at least one educational institution that has international standard at each level (Depdiknas, 2007). There was no clear definition on 'international standard' but the guide books of SBI (Depdiknas, 2007; 2008; 2009) explained that it has to first fulfil the national standard of education (called SNP). Another phrase closely related to 'international standard' in the guide book was that the SNP should be added with enrichment from the standard that has been practiced in school system at Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Previous editions of the guide book (Depdiknas 2007; 2008) state the formula as: $SBI = SNP + X$ (where SNP is the national standard; and X is the enrichment).

This additional requirement is one of the unclear intentions in the policy where school management can refer to for support and guidance. Such setbacks have led to many complicated problems during the program implementation at the school level. Kustulasari (2009) for example argues that there should not be any international accreditation for 'international standard' for school. She states that the term only applied on adopting curriculum (such as International Baccalaureate), examination (Cambridge) and national school overseas.

Two criteria for SBI schools that appear consistently in the official documents (Depdiknas, 2007; 2008; 2009) refer to teachers using English as communication language in the classroom and information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching and learning. When analysed closely, there are limitations to the 'criteria'. For instance, in terms of English, the yard stick used is the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) score as an indicator of teachers' English proficiency at SBI schools. The indicator is not valid because TOEFL measures the ability of non native English speaker and should not become the benchmark of English communication performance in the class. This 'criteria' is a large burden for science and mathematics teachers when their English communication skill is still far from the minimum

requirement level (*Kompas*, 2009; Coleman, 2011). Coleman (2011) found that using English in the SBI classroom is a real obstacle for students to understand and interact with their teachers.

In order to join SBI program, the school is required to prepare documents to be evaluated then it will be granted as SBI school and given an amount of money from the central government (Depdiknas, 2007; 2008; 2009). The school is required to submit a self-evaluation form, one year development plan, five year development plan and an action plan for the academic year.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The research orientation of this study is interpretive, where the researcher's task is "attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meaning people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 3). This study also investigates the way the people involved understand educational activity, in this case, pertaining to the international standard school issue. The study sought to uncover stakeholders' perspectives and understanding particularly with regards to school capacity building issues in the real setting where the researcher enters the respondents' lives, seeks information and interprets what happens (Creswell, 1998; Schwandt, 2000). The extent to which a school interprets and implements SBI policy and the impact on its capacities remains an interesting issue for research. To have a better understanding of the phenomena, a case study approach with suitable methods and appropriate data collection was used (Stake, 2000; Punch 2009).

The research was conducted at a public general secondary school which participated in SBI program located in West Java province in Indonesia. This institution was selected because it is typical of a SBI school, which is a well regarded school in the small city. The 1100 students enrolled at the school were divided into 27 classes (nine classes in each level, i.e. year 10, 11 and 12), with a total teaching staff of 94.

School permission was sought for school and classroom

observations, document data and semi-structured interviews during the three months the researchers spent in the school. The participants for the interviews were the principal, deputy-principals, teachers, students, school committee members and parents where they agreed to be interviewed, recorded electronically (using digital voice recorder) and transcribed. These approaches were selected because the researcher can gather and identify important issues relating to an “international standard” school and school capacity building in particular where views and opinions are gained in more detail from the respondents (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

Data from fieldwork collected were school development plan, school program report, classroom observation reports, school observation notes and transcript of interviews. Data were analysed using data reduction, selection and simplification after which they were coded to develop emerging themes to find their relations to the literature (Creswell, 1994; Hodder, 2000; Yin, 2003).

1.5 FINDINGS

Indonesian Minister of National Education (MoNE) stated that SBI is a government initiative to improve educational quality, and one of its characteristics is establishing an educational standard for its educators (Martiyanti, 2008):

Teachers at particular senior secondary schools, their minimum requirement are 30% of them have master or doctoral degree which comes from accredited university. Also for the principals at least have master degree from qualified university.

This statement shows ambitious criteria that have to be fulfilled for SBI Schools, the reason is supported by research such as the Delors report (1996) which stated that the longer the pre-service teacher education, the better. However, Indonesian teachers are far

from that situation. When the teacher certification program started in 2006 for instance, from 2.7 million teachers, only 35% had undergraduate degrees (*Kompas*, 2006). In the SBI school which participated in the study, from a total of 94 teachers, only eight (9%) had a master degree and all were from the local university whose master courses were not accredited when the data were collected in 2009. A comment from school management shows the latest situation:

We are supporting teachers to continue their study at postgraduate level, this year only two teachers participate in the selection process, one of them succeeded. Although that teacher receives scholarship, we also give her financial support because study at master degree at good university in the big city is very expensive.

One characteristic of SBI that is imposed by its policy is use of English as the communication language in the classroom. As many as 600 SBI school teachers that participated in Test of English for International Communication (ToEIC) across Indonesia that was reported by *Kompas* (2009) is far from satisfactory level. According to Surya Dharma, MoNE's Director of Teacher, even 60% of them were in the lowest level. Such teachers' dilemma could be due to the fact that they were not trained to teach the subjects in English during their pre-service training. The stipulated requirement to use English in the classroom thus becomes a 'big burden' to teachers and the school.

Meanwhile, an official school report stated that only 23 teachers (24% of the total), including eight who are English teachers, declared that they can use English as a communication language (not particularly in the classroom context). Classroom observations by the researcher found that, other than the English subject, the SBI class teachers rarely used English. Throughout the lessons, they use Bahasa Indonesia to explain subject matter, to ask questions, and when giving examples. English use by teachers is limited to greeting at the beginning of the class, confirming

answers (such as 'yes', 'you are right') and saying goodbye when the class ends (Coleman, 2011). One SBI class student shared his experience:

Q: When you are in the class, do teachers and students use English as communication language?

A: Well, regarding that, from teachers to students that rarely happened. There are teachers who open the lesson with English, but delivering the subject still in Bahasa Indonesia. Others, from the beginning till end use Bahasa Indonesia.

Q: Is there any teacher using English all the time?

A: Only the English teachers.

Interestingly, there are other perspectives given by school staff. Two school management officers explain the situation differently:

In terms of English, it is very hard. Improving English cannot be achieved in one or two years... For instance, TOEFL score for teachers should reach 500¹. It is difficult to reach, even for our English teachers. So, this started to be ignored, the most important thing is quality improvement.

Firstly, there is no such thing as English as communication language in the classroom. The [central] government allows using bilingual, which means Bahasa Indonesia still used, but using English is also not a problem to be used, even trilingual with local language, which is Sundanese... Second, previously the target that teachers can speak English in five years, but later changed to ten years. It is cited that the TOEFL score should be at least 500, but it is only a target

to be reached.

In the meantime, two teachers expressed their view about teaching in English in the classroom:

Talking English for opening and closing classroom activity, I can do it... But readiness of using English also involved student ability to understand. So, the solution is to use power point presentation in English, but we explain it in Bahasa Indonesia I am not confident, because I cannot speak English fluently. I only use English terms when explaining the main concepts to students. It is better give the task of English as a communication language only to English teachers.

From a school management perspectives, the alternative solution is questioning the standard set by the central government. For teachers who know their ability, they use pragmatic approach such as emphasis on English as text to be read by students and would even give the task back to the expert.

To overcome this condition, the school helped teachers increase their proficiency by giving English course which was conducted by their own English teachers. Unfortunately, this effort only lasted in two weeks. An English teacher and one science teacher shared their experiences:

At the beginning we teach English for non-English teachers at school. But the schedule for me to teach or other English teachers could not match which made the program failed. At the same time motivation and attitude of some teachers, especially old ones, were not good. They even blame their incapability to English teachers. In terms of English training in the school, practically people are excited at the beginning, and then gradually reduce during the process. This is

because what they teach and the acceptance from others cannot fit. For example, English teacher did not come to the class because of other commitment, which created resentment and the training ended automatically.

Based of this situation, the principal decided that each teacher can pursue their English course in other places. Upon completion, they have to produce the certificate so they can be tested by the school's English teacher. If they pass the test, the cost for the course will be reimbursed by the school. One school management and an English teacher explained:

Regarding English language training, right now many teachers take course in other places. All of the cost we will be compensated only after they prove their progress tested with talking to English teacher. If the result is good, we will pay accordingly; if not we will only pay them less than they spent.

Our principal is supportive about teachers taking English course. He allows me to test teachers who complete the course... because they don't use it frequently; mostly they are not confident enough when tested. They can speak English but the content is difficult to understand, too much focus on grammar.

Another effort practiced by the school is to recruit teachers from other schools who can speak English. In the previous two years the school succeed to get one physics teacher and one religious teacher who can speak English to join. One science teacher tells the story:

For SBI School, teacher's quality is the main reason to be recruited and he or she should be disciplined and has capacity [in English]. Such as

Mr X, he is a physics teacher, who joined us after we implement SBI program.

The two teachers confirmed their recruitment process. They also became the only teachers in the school in their subjects who can deliver English in the classroom more than just greetings. This alternative is an interesting choice rather than to push teachers to communicate in foreign language they cannot master in short time. This is hand-in-hand with the explanation from school management with regards to the current situation:

The big problem here is human resources capability. I am more confident to manage a new school, new teachers, and new students. God willing, in two years time I can make that school become a real international standard school. But, with old school that their teachers, administrative staff situation like this, what can we do more? For example, in terms of English, I am really having difficulty that cannot solve easily.

A teacher shared his perspective related to this:

Senior teachers are majority in this school. So, SBI program is something which is not easy to be handled by them, especially with the target to be competent in English. But, for younger teachers, that becomes a challenge to make them better.

Unlike using English as communication in the classroom, initiatives related to using information technology and multimedia have a better response. Some training was conducted in the school for teachers make them aware of the alternative methods to be used in delivering instructions to students. This is also an opportunity for them to use English in the materials using Microsoft power point, one chemistry teacher shared the experience:

We use power point with English text, for example natrium element is called Sodium in English. At least they know the scientific terms in English.

Another emphasis given by school management is related to teaching science with English:

Biology teachers should be competent in biology. Instead of biology teachers become English teachers in the classroom, which is completely wrong. So, the main point then is using ICT in each subject [to facilitate English].

A physics teacher showed his teaching materials using English with power point presentation. He downloaded some of them from the internet. Classroom observation also confirmed that he used it for instruction. One biology teacher tells her learning innovation that is related to information technology:

In one lesson, students are requested to find the information from the internet. Then, they work as a group to discuss and prepare the result using power point to their classmates. So, not only teachers who are using ICT when teaching in the classroom, students can do it too.

This situation was possible because there are fourteen computers in the teachers' room with internet connection and the school provided digital projector in each SBI classroom.

Relating closely to knowledge and skills of the teacher is professional development. Discussion with school management and teachers revealed that most of the time the school depends on their district institutions for teachers' training and professional development activities. The SBI program creates an urgent need for professional development, and the school has initiated a tailor-

made professional development program. Three of the teachers interviewed said the following:

Q: Have you involved in professional training and development?

A: Yes, I often attended the activities.

Q: How long and who give the training?

A: Between three days to two weeks. The training is conducted by ministry of national education office and education district office.

Q: Is there any training given by the school for teachers?

A: Yes, earlier this semester we are given training to improve motivation as a teacher. Example given is like playing soccer, if we are not motivated enough, whatever ball we play or wherever playing field we use, the game will not interesting.

Q: Have you involved in professional development in school?

A: There is in house training program at school. It involved developing teaching materials and module, lesson plan in each subject. In terms of SBI, we create those in English.

1.6 CONCLUSION

This paper sets out to seek the impact of SBI policy on school capacity building issue in Indonesia related to teaching English in science and mathematics. Realities from one public secondary school in a small city in West Java were presented that led to a better understanding of the complexity in capacity building in a developing country.

It is found that the SBI policy is the continuation of previous school effectiveness program in the Reform era Indonesia

with slightly different target to good schools that have better resources. However, the content of the policy is unclear which make the schools implement modestly with emphasise on facilities, different treatment for students and difficulties to reach certain target such as teachers' English proficiency. The school still struggle with improving teachers skills and knowledge, and regard to developing professional learning community, rely on usual activity controlled by district education office. It seems that the SBI School involved in this study cannot identify its role in terms of improving school capacity building.

In summary, the study shows that the potential for improving capacity building at school level can be started with good policy design and formulation at the central level. This will help the school realistically achieved the goals intended in the complexity of situation they confront.

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