

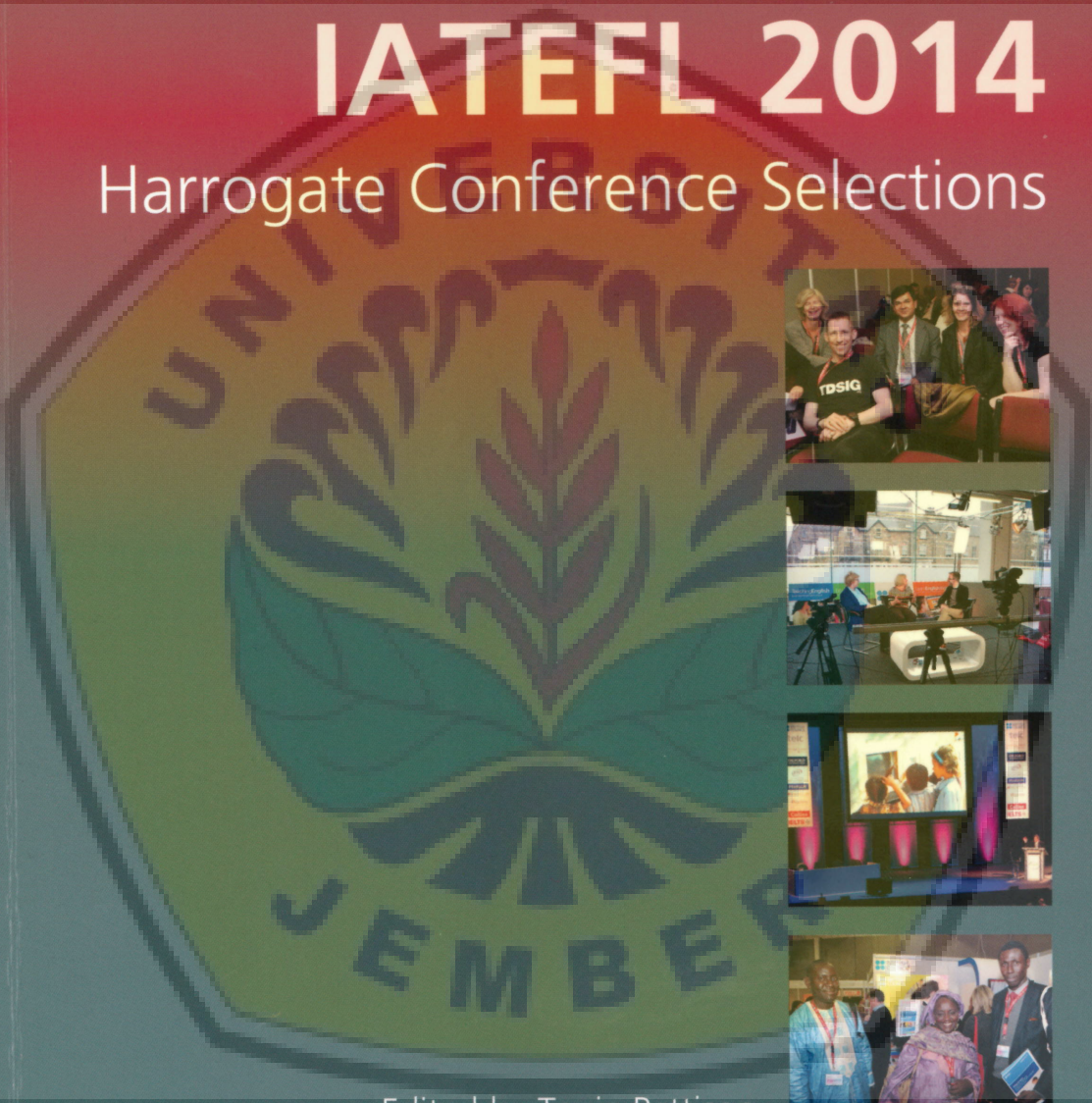


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Harrogate Conference Selections



Edited by Tania Pattison

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4.4 Indonesian English-medium instruction: reversal and controversy

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Introduction

In my presentation, I gave a brief history of English-medium instruction (EMI) in Indonesia and described the controversies behind its reversal. These controversies are as expressed in the narratives of the expert witnesses of both the supporters and the critics of EMI in the legal document governing the termination of Indonesian EMI. The data are originally in Bahasa Indonesia. I translated the extracts presented in this paper into English only for the readers' benefit.

Indonesian EMI: a brief history

Indonesia is a country characterised by linguistic diversity and complexity. With Bahasa Indonesia as the national and official language and more than 700 vernacular languages, language policy and planning has never been a simple issue. Amid this complexity, Indonesia introduced EMI in 2006 in a stream of public schools known as (pilot) International Standard Schools (ISSs). One of the aims was to prepare Indonesian young people to be more competitive globally.

In these schools, a foreign language, predominantly English, was to be used as the language of instruction for the core subjects. However, in most ISSs, English was not only used in the classes but also around the schools and thus became the prominent characteristic of these schools (Coleman 2009). This use of English was considered excessive. In 2011, a group of parents, teachers and academics proposed a judicial review of the ISS-enacting Law (no. 20/ 2003) on the basis that it contravened the Indonesian Constitution of 1945. One of the reasons was that it might endanger Indonesian national identity with Bahasa Indonesia as the national language (CC 2013). In January 2013, the Constitutional Court declared the law unconstitutional. The ruling marked the end of the ISS/EMI era: public schools were no longer permitted to use English except in English classes and had to revert to the use of Bahasa Indonesia as the language of instruction.

Indonesian EMI: the controversies

The narratives surrounding this history contain controversial statements. Witnesses against EMI expressed their concerns over its provision. One worry was that the excessive use of English might jeopardise Indonesian young people's commitment to Bahasa Indonesia. For example, Chadijah, an Indonesian expert in English teaching and teacher training, said, 'I once heard a story; a mother was startled when her child said, "I hate Bahasa", by which s/he meant Bahasa Indonesia ... I think this kid regretted s/he was not born British.' (CC 2013: 77).

Another apprehension was that the application of EMI might endanger the Indonesian people's ideology. Daed Joesof, a former Minister of Education of Indonesia stated, '... the Indonesian nature of the Indonesians, both as human beings and as citizens, is formed by Bahasa Indonesia' (CC 2013: 76).

The final worry expressed in the narrative was that the long-term implementation of EMI might encourage a social divide. Chadijah said, '... in the long run, Bahasa Indonesia, which is the unifying language of Indonesians, will be the language of the low-class people, and this will distinguish them from the educated élite [who speak English]' (CC 2013: 74).

On the contrary, witnesses supporting EMI expressed opposing opinions. One of the constitutional court judges who disagreed with the verdict argued that these ideas were 'exaggerated' and that 'people learn a foreign language not to get rid of Bahasa Indonesia, but because they need the [foreign] language for a better life' (Sumadi, CC 2013: 200). Further, Prastowo, a principal of an ISS in western Java, stated that contrary to the concerns of the critics, the use of English in his school had opened up an opportunity 'to introduce Bahasa Indonesia and Indonesian culture to the overseas communities' through sister school projects (CC 2013: 170). Another principal argued that in his school, they had a programme called 'Local culture goes international', which enabled the children to introduce Indonesian local culture, such as how to grow rice, to foreigners through English. These are some statements that characterise the controversial history of EMI in Indonesia. The differing opinions reflect Shohamy's (2006) argument that language policy can often lead to battles between language ideology and practice.

Conclusion

The controversy surrounding the Indonesian EMI reversal expressed in the narratives deal with the desire to protect Indonesia's linguistic heritage, ideology and equality. These may resonate with what happens in other countries where EMI or other similar bilingual education schemes are being implemented, including those where policy reversal is taking place.

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4.5 Parental attitudes towards English in state primary schools, Assam, India

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Why are the poorest parents in India voting with their feet, staying away from free state primary schools and sending their children to fee-paying private, mostly