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*Exploring
Language, Culture,
and Society*

Essays on Language
Education, Environmental
Studies, Literature Analysis,
and Social Perspectives

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Foreword



Language is a powerful tool that not only facilitates communication but also shapes our understanding of the world and the societies we inhabit. It is through language that we share our thoughts, emotions, and knowledge, enabling us to connect with one another across diverse cultures and backgrounds. In this anthology, aptly titled "Exploring Language, Culture, and Society," we embark on a captivating journey through various essays that delve into the multifaceted aspects of language and its impact on education, the environment, literature, and social dynamics.

The first section, "Language Education and Language Acquisition," sheds light on the challenges and strategies involved in learning and teaching languages. From addressing the needs of older learners to harnessing the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) while promoting critical thinking, these essays provide valuable insights into fostering language proficiency in diverse contexts.

Moving on, the section on "Environmental and Scientific Studies" delves into pressing environmental issues, such as climate change and deforestation. These essays invite us to contemplate the profound consequences of human actions on the planet and encourage us to take responsibility for preserving the environment for future generations.

In "Literature and Language Analysis," we explore the beauty and complexity of literary genres, from poetry to drama, fiction to nonfiction. Through close reading and analysis, we unravel the layers of meaning woven into literary works, expanding our perspectives on the human experience.

The section "Health and Social Studies" touches on the psychological and social dimensions of our lives. From examining university student burnout to understanding the impact of self-concept on our behavior, these essays remind us of the significance of mental and emotional well-being in today's fast-paced world.

As we delve into the essays on "English Language History," we encounter the fascinating evolution of one of the world's most widely spoken languages. From its ancient roots to its modern-day prominence, English has undergone profound transformations, shaped by historical events and cultural influences.

The essays in this anthology serve as a testament to the richness and interconnectedness of language, culture, and society. They invite us to explore, question, and appreciate the intricate tapestry that language weaves in our lives. As readers, we are encouraged to contemplate our roles as global citizens, responsible for fostering understanding, empathy, and positive change in the world.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the diverse authors who have contributed their insights and research to this anthology. Their collective expertise and passion have enriched these pages with valuable knowledge and thought-provoking ideas. May this anthology inspire readers to embrace language as a bridge that connects us all, transcending borders and cultural divides. Let us embark on this enlightening journey of exploration and understanding, for it is through the power of language that we can collectively shape a brighter, more inclusive, and more compassionate world.

Malang, August 2023

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**Language
Education
and
Language
Acquisition**

It's 2023 and English is still not mandatory in primary school: A reflective essay



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Introduction

Having children is tough, especially if we decide to have more than one. Obviously, taking care of children is not as simple as taking care of pets. Children need to grow in an environment where they can develop themselves in an attempt to, at least, progress better than their parents. Parents not only need to take care of their basic needs but also supplement them with affection, skills, and nutrition in order to function well in society and have a better chance of living a prosperous and healthy life. Consequently, raising even one child is a serious responsibility that parents have to bear both financially and mentally. Japan, for example, has a serious problem concerning their population decline (Coulmas, 2007; Kato, 2014). Kato (2014) argued that the low fertility rate in Japan, especially in Tokyo metropolitan areas, is caused by young couples who decided to not have children due to their work schedule and long commute as well as the lack of public facilities in accommodating young families. In Indonesia, the total fertility rate (TFR) is predicted to decline as it is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) set by the Indonesian government (Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak, 2018). I assume that the Indonesian government has decided to suppress the fertility rate in order to encourage parents to care more for their children well-being instead of producing more children which potentially leads to neglection.

In order to ensure excellent development, parents need to equip their children with language skills. In Indonesia, most children grow up bilingually. They speak either Indonesian and one of the regional languages (Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, etc.) or Indonesian and one global lingua franca (English, Arabic, Mandarin, etc.). Indonesia is even dubbed as the country with the top number of trilingual speakers in the world with most of the trilingual speakers are able to speak Indonesian, Javanese, and English (WoWShack, 2022). The data provided an insight on how versatile the Indonesian people in learning languages and how the global lingua franca plays a vital role in Indonesian society. However, the Indonesian government published a controversial policy in 2013 in which the government decided not to put English language as one of the mandatory subjects in the primary school curriculum (Sya & Helmanto, 2020). As a result, many parents are putting their children in bilingual schools which provide English, Arabic, or Mandarin in the schools' curriculum. Many of these schools are private schools and parents have to spend more in order to equip their children with adequate international language lessons.

There are two questions that this essay is attempting to answer. First, what are the consequences regarding the government decision to cross English out of the primary school curriculum? Second, what do schools, especially state schools, need to do to improve their English language learning? These questions will be answered by taking into account my personal experience as well as published journal articles and books.

Parents' dilemma

There are many things to consider when making appropriate decisions for our children. What food should we give our children? Are they nutritious? Will our children eat them happily? What school should we put our children in? Can we afford it? Will our children be safe? These kinds of questions should pop up whenever parents make important decisions for their children. I assume most of you who read this essay are (potentially) loving and caring parents and you want the best things for your children. If these thoughts haven't crossed your mind, then maybe reconsider having children in the first place. If the thoughts have crossed your mind, then that means you have applied critical thinking in helping you to make good decisions.

I personally have a son who speaks English as his first language. So, my main concern when finding a school for my son was 'does the school use English for daily communication?'. The last thing that I want to see is my son not being able to enjoy school because he has no one to talk to. I'm confident that many parents, albeit not the majority, share my concern for their children as well. I have to spend considerably more on my son's education, just to acquire this feature. Many schools see this opportunity and they use it, if not exploit it, for their benefit. Luckily, my son's school put a significant emphasis in learning languages (English, Indonesian, and Mandarin) in which I think will be a tremendous benefit for him. The fact that a school can provide such benefit should be accessible to all Indonesian citizens. What if there are parents who are concerned about their children's language development (especially international languages) but they are not able to provide such opportunities because of funding issues? The government should be able to bridge this gap and provide equal opportunities for everyone.

By making the English subject as optional for primary school level, the Indonesian government potentially deprive young Indonesian people's chance to be global citizens. Crystal (2008) estimated that there are approximately 1.3 billion people speak English as either first or second language globally. The Indonesian government policy regarding the English subject will most likely do more harm than good.

There's a possibility that we will have a whole generation with difficulties in using English as an important communication tool and it won't look pretty for the development of Indonesia as a nation with approximately 270 million people.

The golden age for learning languages is generally defined as less than 13-year-old according to the critical period hypothesis (Harley & Wang, 2014). If we don't utilise that learning opportunity, children will not be able to achieve maximum efficiency in their language acquisition. This will be apparent in their later language production, especially in speaking. If we turn a blind eye to the fact that English subject is not mandatory in primary schools, then the younger generation will have a slim chance to be able to take part in competing globally.

Making English lessons meaningful

The other issue, that we need to be concerned with, is the fact that most primary schools are still emphasising grammar lessons when teaching English in class. According to Sya & Helmanto (2020), 72% of schools which participated in their study are mostly teaching grammar in class. The schools are not only state owned but also private schools. Learning languages should not be conducted purely on learning grammar especially for young learners.

Instead, schools need to integrate their language learning in students' daily life. Greetings, asking for favours, showing gratitude, giving simple instructions can be done by using the target language. Therefore, students learn how to use the language in real life context instead of trying to grasp the abstract concept of grammatical rules in the English language. In addition, state schools can elevate their bargaining position as well as their reputations in front of parents.

Implementing the idea of teaching meaningful English, however, is challenging. Schools need to make sure that they have teachers who are capable of using English to at least C1 level. Having teachers as role models in using the English language is essential because young learners will most likely remember things that their teachers taught them. If they are exposed to incorrect use of language, then it will potentially hinder their progress in acquiring the target language. Therefore, the recruitment process needs to be evaluated and supervised rigorously. In addition, making sure that capable teachers receive proper incentives should also be regulated and implemented by the government so that teachers will be motivated to give their best.

Conclusion

The consequences of taking out English as a mandatory subject from primary school will potentially cost Indonesia dearly as a nation. Students will not be able to take full advantage of the critical period of acquiring and learning languages. As a result, a whole generation might not be able to compete competitively on a global scale later on due to the lack of English language exposure during childhood. In addition, learning English in schools should be meaningful and not really focusing on studying grammar. By integrating language learning in students' everyday life, the learning process will be meaningful and fun to do instead of discussing grammar related questions in class. Hopefully, the Indonesian government will be able to respond to this crisis promptly.

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