

THE PORTRAIT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUBJECT IN AN INDONESIAN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION OF COMPUTER SCIENCE (HECS)

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Abstract: At the tertiary level in Indonesia, English language subject is mandatory as a general education course, especially for those non English programs/ departments. How this subject be positioned in an Indonesian Private Higher Education of Computer Science (HECS)' curriculum, that later breeds the representation of the subjects on its teaching materials and its teaching and learning process by the teacher, and the students's perceptions on such implementation of English subjects in the classroom become the concerns of this study. Qualitative research by using interviews, questionnaires and documents were used to collect the data. From the study, it was found that in this institution English is considered as an English for Specific Purposes(ESP), though regarded as a minor subject, yet its existence is considered as important. This perception is acceptable by all stakeholder (the institution, the lecturer and the students).

Keywords: *English, Higher Education of Computer Science, English for Specific Purposes*

INTRODUCTION

Based on the current laws of National Education System in Indonesia (the 1989 Education law No.2 and the 1999 Government Regulation on Higher Education No. 60), education at the tertiary level is mainly designed for profession building. The students in higher education prepared to take specific and major subjects to support their future profession. However, they are still required to take the mandatory subjects called General Education courses (*Mata Kuliah Dasar Umum/ Mata Kuliah Umum*) that provide general knowledge. Besides *Bahasa Indonesia*, Religion, Civics and other courses, English Language (*Bahasa Inggris*) is one of them. Due to its importance, the minister of education has issued and

applied regulation that English should be taught in the primary schools up to the university level. English that to be functioned not only as effective and efficient means of interaction but also as the medium of instruction. Moreover, English is also included to develop and disseminate the technology and arts that would uplift the quality of life enhanced by the national cultures.

Without any exception, STMIK Mardira Indonesia (STMIK MI), one of several existing private Higher Education of Computer Science (HECS) in Bandung, also includes such mandatory General Education courses in its curriculum. Although, in its implementation, the courses might commonly be perceived to be less important and less challenging than their

own institution' major and specific subjects. This perception is relevant to the survey conducted by Alwasilah (2000) on viewing students' perception on the teaching and learning of mandatory language courses, i.e Bahasa Indonesia and English as General education.

The survey finds that the goal or the aim of their curriculum is still far from the expectation. For example, for General English, most of students, who has been learning English for several years, starting from the elementary to the secondary schools level then continuing studying at the tertiary schools level, their language competence and abilities are still poor. The substances/ materials or the teaching and learning practices are mostly the repetition of those learnt and done in the previous level, and the stress is commonly on grammar or structure (Alwasilah, 2000; Kusni, 2009).

Alwasilah (2000) regards the government policy to put English or Bahasa Indonesia as General Education courses in the curriculum of higher education - in its implementation - as out of control. The facts are seen on its teaching and learning practice, in which teachers teach as they like, and students' learning is just to get the score and pass the subject. General English that basically aiming at students' competences on integrated language skills, such as speaking, writing, reading and listening, has turned on emphasizing on grammatical structure.

However, apart from such negative facts, learning English Language is then still required at university level. Students are still necessary to master both spoken and written languages because English is an international language, the language of sciences and knowledge, and furthermore most of textbooks are written in English. To adopt and

understand those, students are required to master the language, at least having a skill on reading comprehension.

In this case, Alwasilah (2000) suggests on reorganizing or remodeling the implementation of General English on higher education level, otherwise discarding them for its inappropriateness to the students' need. Then, the effort to do is how to make use of this General English learning to become useful in helping students to master English.

As the poor practice of teaching and learning process might also happen in this institution, and the goal of the course to make students having the competence of (at least) reading skills, even less to fulfill STMIK MI's goal to produce graduates who can speak English well are not yet achieved, how this English subject be treated and implemented in STMIK MI, where English is not part of the major subjects in all programs and departments, and whether English subject be treated as a general English subject or English as a specific purposes (ESP), as well as the students' perception on this subject in term of its materials and syllabus become the concerns of this study.

Different people may interpret ESP differently. Some identify it as 'simply being the teaching of English for any purpose that could be specified', while others, however, are more precise, describing it as the teaching of English used in academic studies or the teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes" (Anthony 1997, p. 1). Strevens (1988) argues that ESP may be worded differently in terms of its definitions. But, what is important is that whoever is concerned with ESP should know that ESP is "designed to meet specific needs of learners; related to content, to particular disciplines, occupations and activities; and centered.

At the university level, English language teachers and learners often encounter different issues that might hamper achieving a successful teaching/learning function. One of the most important issues is the teacher/learner interaction within specific contexts of English language which is English for Specific purposes. In this context, Hyland (2002, p. 394) argues that "effective language teaching in the universities involves taking specificity seriously. It means that we must go as far as we can".

For teachers this means introducing learners to the relevant genres with the purpose of allowing them to participate in a discourse community organized around specific and purposeful activities. This can be approached in pragmatic or critical ways, and there has been a considerable amount of discussion about the need to avoid uncritical induction of students into disciplinary discourses and identities (Canagarajah 2002; Harwood & Hadley 2004; Pennycook 1997).

In Indonesian context, Marwan's (2009) research highlights the findings of a study investigating the challenges faced by an English teacher in his ESP teaching in an Indonesian vocational higher institution. The challenges related to the issues like, students' learning motivation, the mismatch between reality and expectations, lack of quality resources, and heavy workload. Some solutions to cope with these challenges such as finding the actual factors which cause the decline of students' learning motivation is crucial because it will help teachers identify appropriate strategies to overcome the problem. The mismatch between reality (students' English proficiency background) and (curriculum) expectations considered to be an urgent matter that needs fixing by an ideal solution that vocational higher institution should plan to accept students

who can only meet a certain English proficiency standard, or some others solution provided by institution.

Meanwhile, Kusni's (2007) study shows the needs of reformulating the design of English for specific purposes (ESP) courses for university students who do not major in English. The idea for the study was derived from the research on designing ESP programs by conducting the survey in three public universities in Indonesia indicating that there is a fundamental misunderstanding with the design of ESP courses which made the teaching of such courses ineffective and inefficient. His study is in line with Alwasilah survey (2000). He suggests a solution with using the collective collaborative model in implementing ESP theory with its context.

In relation to the research conducted in Higher Education of Computer Science, in 2007, Marjito studies the research on the relevance of the syllabus and materials of English Subject to the student's needs. The results shows that the lecturer should redesign either syllabus or material in order to cater students' need, particularly grammar and reading. In brief, the syllabus and material provided were not fully relevance to the students' need.

In Tunisia, Harabi's (2010) study scrutinizes the international aspect of the English language and its relation to the ESP context. It highlights the major constraints to English language teaching and learning in the Tunisian higher education. According to Harabi, There is no specific training for the teachers of English for specific purposes in all the examples of institutes being researched. Indeed, teachers are faced with learners who already had some knowledge of English acquired in a school situation. Moreover, most of the materials and courses available were appropriate for

those coming to the study of the language for the first time, suitable for younger learners, and were written as 'general' English, thus a gap in materials had to be filled for these specific purpose learners (2010).

Since ESP programs focus on developing English competence in a specific field, such as software development, business or technology. Some courses prepare students for various academic programs: English for Science and Technology, English for Accounting, English for Computer, etc. In the case of students of STMIK Mardira Indonesia, whose background are out of English department, to meet the needs to have highly specific academic and professional reasons for seeking to improve their language skills to comprehend English textbook or computer instruction (Stevens, 1988) where most reference books are written not in simple English, obviously ESP need to apply in their study (Hutchinson & Waters 1987).

Based on the above description, the concerns of this study attempt to address the issues of how English Language subject in STMIK MI be regarded in its institution' overall curriculum, and to find out the students' perceptions on such implementation in the syllabus and materials used as well as the teaching and learning process.

The research questions are formulated as follows: (1) How English subjects be regarded in the institution' scurriculum? (2) What are the students' perception towards the implementation of English subjects, in terms of its materials and teaching and learning practices in their study?

METHOD

The research was conducted at STMIK Mardira Indonesia, a private

higher education of Computer science in Bandung which has two-shifted classes, the regular class (the classes held from 08.00 to 14.00) and the evening class (in which some of the students are employees, held from 17.00 to 21.00). There are three departments involved: *Manajemen Informatika*, *Teknik Informatika*, and *Komputerisasi Akuntansi* with three different programs, the one-year program (Diplome-1), the three-year program (Diplome-3), and the degree program (S-1). Meanwhile, for teaching English process, three departments are commonly organized to be one and the size of a class range between 40-50 students.

The major reasons why this institution was chosen were as follows: first, the English subject is only part of MKDU subject, and since the institution deals with computer major, the English applied should be an ESP (English for Specific Purposes). Second, each of department has been accredited by *BAN PT*. Third, the implication of this research is hoped to be able to provide improvement of designing either syllabus or materials at the research site.

Eighteen students were involved as the participants in this study. They are all students from three departments (*Manajemen Informatika*, *Komputerisasi Akuntansi*, and *Manajemen Informatika*) who were chosen randomly from different grades (the first, third, and fifth semester students). They are students from the regular class as well as from the evening class, with the academic year ranging from 2009 to 2011. They had the same opportunity to answer the questionnaires and be able to provide information needed.

An English teacher and the head of the institution were also involved as the participants to answer and provide information about other aspects related

to the materials used, the practice of teaching and learning and the policy of conducting and providing the English subject in this institution.

Qualitative research method was used to collect the data. Data were collected by the means of questionnaires for students and interviews with a teacher and the Head of institution, and documentation of the institution curriculum. Using the qualitative approach, the data were then obtained by using questionnaires, interviews, and documentation (syllabus and materials). All the data were analyzed on the basis of the research questions stated and were classified into two central themes. First, the existence and the role of the English language subject in STMIK MI's curriculum. Second, the students' perception about the English subjects provided in STMIK MI, in terms of its materials and teaching and learning practices.

The data from interview, documents and questionnaires were analyzed to answer the research question. The function of three research instruments (interviews, documents and questionnaires) in seeking the answer to the research questions were summarized below:

1. Interviews were conducted with the participants to get the data of the institution policy regarding English subjects in its curriculum and the teacher's interpretation about English subjects in STMIK MI.
2. Syllabus and materials functioned as documents to support the data about kinds of syllabus and material provided by the lecturer. Then, these documents were matched to the data from interviews whether among of them were relevance or not.
3. The questionnaires given to the students were used to see how

students' perception to the English subjects in terms of the materials used and its teaching and learning process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data derived from the interview with the Head of STMIK MI and the document, English Language subject is considered as the mandatory subject to support other main and core subjects in the institution. The subject belongs to the category of General Education Courses (MKDU/MKU = *Mata Kuliah Dasar Umum/ Mata Kuliah Umum*). Given four (4) credits to this English subject, this then divided into two different subjects called '*Bahasa Inggris 1 (BI-1)*' and '*Bahasa Inggris 2 (BI-2)*', with two (2) credits for each. The subjects are given to the students in two different semester. *Bahasa Inggris I* is given to all students in the first semester, while *Bahasa Inggris 2* is given to the students of all programs at the end of semester. For example, at semester II for Diplome I, semester VI for Diplome III program, and at eight semester for S1 degree program. (See the excerpt of interview with the Head of STMIK MI and the *buku Panduan*)

The purposes of the two subjects are different in nature. BI-1 is intended to provide students with the ability of comprehending text, while BI-2 focuses on conversation, on students' speaking ability, especially helping them to prepare their readiness in facing the job interview. Having such different goals at the end of the lectures, the content of each subject materials are also different. The texts contained with some information about computer and its programs become the major source of materials used in BI-1, while the content materials related to the language function in making conversation and

those related to job interviews are becoming the course of material in BI-2.

The students of this institution are divided into two categories, the regular students and the employee class students. The regular students are mostly those who failed to join government public universities or other favourite private colleges, graduated from private high schools. Meanwhile, the employee students are those who have already worked in several companies. It can be said that the students come from the middle to lower level both on their academic achievement and their social economic background. With such condition shall automatically impact on their quality before the join STMIK MI. However, to accomodate their needs for continuing their study in higher education level, STMIK MI makes every efforts to give the best support to its students. The institution endeavor to create good and high grade environment to support their teaching and learning process. To accomodate the students' needs in taking English Language subject, STMIK provides the morning and afternoon classes. The regular students usually take the morning class while the afternoon class is usually taken by the employee class student, and they may possibly interchange its schedules.

There is only one English lecturer available for about 500 students enrolled in STMIK MI, with various number of students in each department, i.e. 10 students in Informatics Management dept., and more than 25 students in other department. To negotiate such condition as well as considering the effectivity and efficiency, the English lecture is held as a general lecture for all students of different departments. In consequence, the big class of about more than 50 students is common for this subject. The

lecture for this big class is held in the school hall. Provided by the availability of instructional facilities such as in-focus, audio visual and internet connections in each classroom and the hall has made the lecture possible.

The regular evaluation is held regularly by the Institution to all subjects, including English. Besides the evaluation and sharing time between lectures in the beginning of each semester, the fortnight learning society forum are held for all lecturers. This activities intended to be used as the place for sharing experiences and problem-solution time as well as the media to socialize the institution' policy related to the teaching and learning process and teachers' development. The regular feedback from students before the midterm and final term tests is also available. This students' feedback is also used as one of the institution consideration to evaluate the lecturers and the course subjects.

Having 14 years teaching experience of English subject in STMIK MI and other Higher Education of Computer Science, it is considered that the lecturer has quite used to know the students needs and the challenges faced in the teaching an learning process.

To implement the mandatory English Subjects in this institution, the lecturer try to develop the syllabus and teaching materials in line with the aims/ goals stated by the institution in each of the English subjects called *Bahasa Inggris 1 (BI-1)* and *Bahasa Inggris 2 (BI-2)*. The materials contented in BI-1 are made to support the students to comprehend the texts with the topics related to computer programs. Few grammatical structures, i.e. 'to be, to have, modal, passive voice, degrees of compariosn, word formation', commonly used in the reading texts are also introduced (source: *Modul Bahasa*

Inggris 1). And the materials given in BI-2 are those related with the certain function in doing conversation, such as how to deals with the interview; how to make questions sentences, discussion techniques, making decision, dialogue, practical english conversation, common job interview questions, presentation and making an application letter (source: *Modul Bahasa Inggris 2*).

Those both materials are not always fixed all the time, they are flexible to be changeable by choosing different texts or topics as long as the coverage is still in line with the syllabus. The sources from the Internet, mostly used to become the teaching materials. According to him, BI-1 is more related to English for specific purposes, with the focus of English for computers, and BI-2 is more general since the content mostly related to general conversation.

The challenges he faces in teaching process and providing the materials to the students are related to: (1) the academic background of the students, who mostly have lower academic achievement in their previous study (high school), with mostly having poor English skills. (2) the time constraint the students have in joining the subjects, especially for employee students who oftenly come late to the lecture. (3) the number of students in the class that ranging between 35 to 70 students. (4) the low motivation of the students who join the subjects just to do the requirement and not really to study it seriously. (5) the assessment which is merely more subjective and normative.

Based on the questionnaires given to several STMIK MI' students, it was found that all of them like English language subject. The reasons are quite various, such as:

- Because English in an international language, and we have to be able to

speak/ master such language. (7 respondents)

- Because English in needed in our future job. (5 respondents)
- Because English language is nice to hear and speak. (1 respondent)
- Because I like to sing English song (1 respondent)
- Because English mostly used in the Internet (1 respondent)

In terms of students' speaking, writing and reading ability, from the 18 (eighteen) respondents, 10 (ten) of them say that they could speak English a bit, as their statements:

- *"tidak lancar tapi dapat mengucapkan"* (R1, R13)
- *"bisa tapi tidak terlalu banyak"* (R15, R26, R25, R17)
- *"itu dipelajari sejak SD"* (R7)
- *"hanya sedikit, itupun kosakatanya yang umum"* (R14)

Eight of them say they could not speak but understand what other people say.

- *"mengerti yang dibicarakan, tapi tidak bisa balik berbicara memakai bahasa Inggris".* (R10)
- *"karena tidak banyak punya kosa kata"* (R2, R20)

Fifteen out of eighteen say that they could write and understand a bit when they read the reading texts,

- *"telah dipelajari sebelumnya"* (R7)
- *"mampu memahami dan menulis teks bahasa Inggris tapi tidak terlalu"* (R15)
- *"mampu sedikit-sedikit karena suka mendengar lagu bahasa Inggris"* (R10)

In terms of students' interpretation about the English subject and its teaching and learning process, following are the results.

- *"Bahasa Inggris ini penting tetapi termasuk pelajaran yang susah"* (R17)

- *“menarik tapi kurang menyenangkan, perlu ditambah sedikit bercanda saat di kelas” (R8)*
- *“sedikit membosankan dan perlu dikemas lebih menarik lagi” (R19)*
- *“menurut saya cukup menyenangkan, meski seharusnya cara mengajarnya ditambah seperti diskusi kelompok, dlsb” (R15, R13)*
- *“sebenarnya sih menarik, tapi itu sangat tergantung sama dosennya. Kalo dosennya menyenangkan, pasti belajarnya juga asyik. Tapi kalo dosennya membosankan bawaannya ngatuk” (R16)*
- *“terlalu tegang, efeknya tidak masuk ke otak, terus lupa begitu saja apa pelajaran yang didapatnya (R1)*

About the scheduled time dan number of credits of the English subject, a respondent says, *“2 SKS untuk Bahasa Inggris I dan 2 SKS untuk Bahasa Inggris 2 saya rasa sudah cukup” (R 25)*

About the content of course materials, in BI-1, most students say that grammar and text comprehension become the focus of the English subject. As what the students say:

- *“memahami teks dan grammar” (R14)*
- *“teks2 yang berhubungan dengan komputer dan pemrograman” (R12)*

For BI-2, most students agree that speaking and conversation become the focus of the course.

Below are the results of students' expectation from the English subjects:

- *“dapat memperlancar dalam berbicara dengan bahasa Inggris” (R1)*
- *“gramatika, kosakata yang lebih berhubungan dengan komputer/ lebih spesifik tidak hanya mengertikan teks saja, juga conversation yang berhubungan dengan komputer dan perkantoran (R15)*
- *“dapat memahaminya dengan cepat dan menguasai banyak kosa kata” (R20)*

- *“dapat lancar menulis dan berbicara bahasa Inggris” (R26)*
- *“dapat lancar berbicara bahasa Inggris, dapat mengerti dan dipahami (R25)*

Lastly, the impacts of this subject to the students skills/achievement are as follows.

- *“sekarang saya sudah mulai bisa memahami teks dalam bahasa Inggris” (R20)*
- *“dapat mengerti bahasa Inggris dan mampu berbicara bahasa Inggris terhadap orang asing/ bule” (R25)*
- *“lebih memahami teks dan grammar” (R14)*
- *“lebih dapat mengemukakan pendapat dalam bahasa Inggris” (R15)*

From the presentation of data above, it can be seen that the mandatory English subject in the tertiary level, especially in Higher education of Computer Science like STMIK MI could be positioned as the minor yet important subjects expected to help students in coping with other subjects. Though in its implementation and presentation to the students in the classroom face several challenges, i.e. the range of time availability (in this case the limited number of credits and the time scheduled of providing the subjects), the students social economic and academic background that directly or indirectly have several impact to the product and the quality of teaching and learning process.

As the support of other subjects, the English subjects is then becoming English for specific purposes with the content materials of the subjects related to computer science. This is inline with Strevens (1988), that ESP meets the needs of the learners, centered on the language skills (in this case reading and speaking skills) and in specific genres (computer).

In general, the students' perception towards the materials of ESP in STMIK MI as being appropriate with their needs

to understand and comprehend the texts about computers. They get this materials in Bahasa Inggris 1 subject. Meanwhile, their future needs in dealing with the ability to do the successful job interview is represented by the materials they have in English for Business in Bahasa Inggris 2 subject. Though in its implementation, the result of this subject is still far from the goals/ aims of the subjects, that is to make the students able to read as well as speak well, as several constraints coming from both the institution (in this case the limited lecturer and time) and the students (lack of motivation and interest, time constraint).

CONCLUSION

This paper sought to reveal the mandatory English subjects as it is regarded in STMIK MI's curriculum, where in one side it is considered as important to have to support students in coping with other subjects, yet in other side the availability of time, the limited resource, in this case the availability of English lecture, and the students motivations have become the constraints to make this subjects reach its institutional goal to provide the students with the English skills both spoken and written. The study was carried out within the framework of interpretive inquiry and semi structured interviews were used as the means for data collection. Data were analyzed through the identification themes related to the research questions given.

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