
Language Education

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ABSTRAK

Language plays an important role in the life of nation and state. It cannot be eliminated in human civilization. Indonesia has 742 languages spoken throughout the archipelagos. This situation puts Indonesia as one of the most diverse countries in the world. However, as the unifying language, Indonesia has one language, namely **Bahasa Indonesia**. Thus, studying the language as well as language education is very important for all people of Indonesia. This article discusses about the important roles of Language Education in Plural Society, Language Education in the 21st Century, and Language Education in Facing MEA. By realizing the importance of the language, Indonesian people will not leave behind people from other countries in the progress of Science and Technology

Keyword: Language, Education

Introduction

Language is the basic, essential object that is very meaningful in human's life. Language is also a dynamic thing in human energy and activities. Language is not something that comes from outside process of activity, but from the organic utilization and creative power of man, so that language is the pattern and form assumed by the human mind (Andryani, 2015). Language is born of the individual, which develops in the community, and united in the bonds of the nation. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) in Widjojo and Mashudi (2004) explains that the language of a nation is the soul of the nation itself, and their soul is their language. Based on that opinion, the attitude of a nation to its language will greatly determine the existence of the nation in the future.

According Keraf (1997: 1) language is a means of communication among members of the public in the form of sound symbols produced by human speech tools. The communication can be oral, written or even gestures. The language consists of words used by society and the rules for varying and combining those words (Kurniati and Izhar, 2015). It can be said that the language is not just a dialect and a way of communicating, but it is part of the social group's way of life. Language may show how a person or a group of people thinks, and it is also able to strengthen the identity of a person or group. Therefore, learning a language cannot be separated from learning how language is used in everyday life, especially how it is influenced and also shapes the culture of its native speakers. This explains that a person who studies a

particular language without understanding his culture, has the potential to be a "stupidly eloquent" person (Bennet, Bennet & Allen, 2003).

Language plays an important role in the life of nation and state. Data from ACDP (2014) shows that many countries have bilingual or multilingual languages, and more than 20 countries have more than one national language. However, the majority of countries are monolingual, means that they have set one language for government and law. Amazingly, it is reported that Indonesia has 742 languages spoken throughout the archipelagos. This situation puts Indonesia as one of the most diverse countries in the world. The diversity of the languages should be preserved. However, as the unifying language, Indonesia has one language, namely Bahasa Indonesia. Thus, studying the language as well as language education is very important for the people of Indonesia.

The role of language is not only applies in general, but it applies to oneself. In other words, the language essentially affects human behaviour. The reflection of human behaviour is expressed by what they say. If the speech is conformed to the behaviour, then this is what we know as the integrity. It means that the language may show one's integrity. In addition, through language, the behaviour and character of a person can be clearly assessed.

The Role of Language in Plural Society

As mentioned before, language is a tool in everyday communication, both oral and written. Oral or non-standard communication is very practical. Sometimes, someone does not pay special

attention when he/she wants to speak. As a result, he/she has problems when he/she is asked to use or write more standard language. When he/she is required to speak for a more purposeful purpose, in a formal speech for example, he/she will tend to be rigid. As a result, the process of speaking is not smooth, sometimes he/she combines using standard language with non-standard language or even. In fact, language is very flexible, very manipulative. A person can always manipulate the language for a particular purpose. Therefore, in order to manipulate the language, everybody must know the role of the language.

Basically, in heterogeneous human life the language has certain roles and functions based on one's needs, for example, language can be used as a tool for self-expression, self-development, communicating, integrating and adapting socially in a particular environment or situation, and as a tool for exercise social control (Keraf 1997; Pamungkas 2012). The role of the language continues to be used until the end of one's life, but the development and growth of language is influenced by the demands of the times. The rapid flow of globalization in life will have an impact on the development and growth of language as a means of supporting the growth and development of culture, science and technology. In the current era of globalization, the role of language becomes increasingly important and cannot be eliminated. The following will describe some of the roles of language in plural societies in the era of globalization, namely:

a. Language as a Self-Expression Tool

The use of language as a self-expression is done when one wants to achieve a

predetermined goal. Language is able to express images, intentions, ideas, and feelings. Through the language, one can express everything implied in his heart and mind. There are two elements that encourage a person to express himself, the first one to attract the attention of others and the second is the desire to free himself from all the emotional distress. The forms of expression that displayed are very diverse, some can be seen clearly, and some are not (body language). However, as a form of self-expression, language has played its role very clearly in heterogeneous human life.

b. Language as a Personal Development Tool

The use of language as a tool of self-development, leads to what we know as the skills of *Verbal Linguistic Intelligence*. The intelligence of language shows the ability of a person to use language and words effectively both spoken (telling, oratory, orator, or politician) and written (journalists, writers, editors and authors), in different forms to express his ideas. The expression of the idea aims for many things, and one of them is for self-development. For example when a child wants to continue his education to an outside country, in order to improve and develop his own potential. The child must master the local language, so that the learning process can run optimally. The example confirms that language is very influential in improving the quality or self-competence, which leads to the improvement of human resources of a country.

c. Language as a Communication Tool

The main function of language is as means of communication. Communication is a further result of self-expression. Communication will not be perfect if self-expression is not accepted or understood by others. As a tool of communication, language is the channel of goal formulation, which gives birth to feelings and allows to create cooperation with fellow citizens. Language is able to organize a variety of community activities, plan, and direct the future (Keraf 1997). The diversity of language dialects that are spread in several countries, resulting in communication not being smooth. Therefore, one unifying language is needed. To be a unifying language between countries, of course there are requirements that must be met. These requirements include simple language structures, shared basic structures, and have a philosophical history accepted by all members (Harmoko, 2015). Based on the current globalization, the universal language (English) is a unifying language, but if viewed from the domination of language mastery by citizens in Southeast Asia, the Malay language and Indonesian language is a unifying language.

d. Language as a Result of Science and Technology Development

Language can be associated with the development of science and technology. This can be seen from the rapid progress of science and technology, which generally use the universal language (English). Tsui and

Tollefs on (2007) state that if you want to access the science and technology, you have to have an understanding of English usage. In other words, having a good skill and ability in English is a must for those who want to get knowledge easily. On the one hand, the use of universal language in the advancement of Science and Technology also makes the national language of a country getting left behind.

According to Sunaryo (2000) without any language, science and technology cannot grow and develop. In other words, the role of language in the development of science and technology is enormous. The development of science and technology can develop the national language and can also degrade the national language, therefore it is expected that the mastery of language, especially the universal language as a form of language development must be accompanied by the preservation of the national language.

e. Language as a Tool of Social Integration and Adaptation

Language as one of the elements of culture, allows certain communities of a country to socialize with other communities. Community members can only be united efficiently through the language. As expressed by Liddicoat, *et.al* (2003), language is not merely structure, but also communication and social. Today's language learning affirms that the ability to speak fluently like native speakers is no longer the most important thing, but an

understanding of the culture of the learned language has proven to play an important role in determining the success of message delivery and the smooth communication among speakers and their interlocutors. The development effort of intercultural competence began to take precedence, as the ideal thing to be achieved in language learning, especially the second language or foreign languages.

f. Language as a Tool of Social Control

As a tool of social control, language is very effective. This social control can be applied to oneself as well as to society. Various information, and education are delivered through the language. Textbooks and other books of knowledge are one example of the use of language as a means of social control.

g. Language as a Tool in Improving the Economy

There is a close relationship between language and economic factors. That is, language is one of the means to attract the attention of the buyers. Some examples can be put forward here. Traders in Medina and Makkah often use Indonesian or Malay when serving buyers from Indonesia or Malaysia. Psychologically, the language approach feels more effective, practical, and gives rise to a familiar atmosphere between two different citizens.

h. Language as the Identity of a Nation

More specifically and fundamentally, language is not only a tool of self-expression and as a means of communication, but rather as a tool for self-identity. Language is able to show a point of view, an understanding of a thing, the origin of nation, education, nature, and culture. Through language, the identity of a nation can be judged. The language that a nation possesses is characteristic that distinguishes it from other nations.

1. Language Education in the 21st Century

The basic idea of education is ‘to build’ human beings in order to survive to protect themselves against nature and to manage relationships among humans, especially when education is faced in an era where everyone has to compete in various sectors of life (Afandi, et al., 2016). Education is a complex process of knowledge and capacities passed on to the next generation. Each generation will always explore and develop new knowledge and skills aimed at overcoming challenges. Long time ago, Ki Hajar Dewantara said that the humanist education emphasizes the importance of preserving human existence, in the sense of helping human beings become more human, more cultured. The concept of education can run optimally if communication can be established smoothly, therefore smooth communication will be created if there is a good language education. The importance of language education has begun long ago, and until now continues

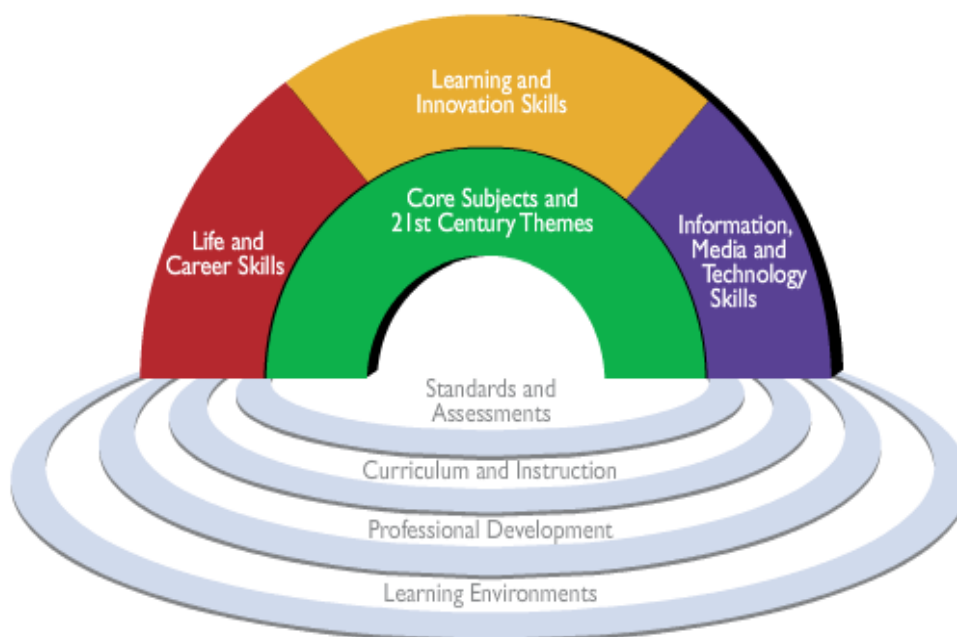
to grow in line with the development of 21st century education. According to BSNP (2010) the characteristics of the 21st century are:

- a. More attention to environmental issues. The implications are mainly on: global warming, energy, food, health, environment, and mitigation.
- b. The world of life will be increasingly connected by information technology. The implications are mainly on: defence and defence systems, education, industry, and communications.
- c. Science will be increasingly converging. The implications are mainly on: research, philosophy of science, education paradigm, and curriculum.
- d. The revival of the economic centre is split between East and Southeast Asia. The implications for: political and economic strategy, industry, and defence.
- e. The changing from resource-based and human-based economies to a knowledge-based economy. Implications for: the quality of human resources, education, and employment.
- f. Increasing attention to the creative industries and cultural industries. The implications are mainly on: diversity of various cultures, creative education, *entrepreneurship*, *technopreneurship*, and production houses.
- g. Culture will affect each other with *technoscience*. The implications are mainly on: character, personality,

etiquette, ethics, law, criminology, and the media.

- h. A change of university paradigm, from "Ivory Tower" to "Economic Movement Engine". There is an increasing trend of investments being invested from the public sector to universities for basic and applied science research and tech / design innovations that have an impact on industrial development and economic development in a broad sense.

Eight core essence of the 21st century mentioned affirms that the increase of human resources must be balanced with the stabilization of the nation's character. One of the efforts that can be done is through language education. Language education serves as a means of communication that must be mastered by every human being, especially learners. Based on the challenges of 21st century education, the role of language education through the improvement and development of communication skills becomes more important, it is clear in the following figure:



Picture1. Core 21st Century Skills

Source: *21st Century Skills, Education, Competitiveness. Partnership for 21st Century, 2008*

The picture shows that the learning process is not enough just to improve

the knowledge through core subjects only, but must be equipped with the

ability to think critically, creatively, has a strong character (responsible, social, tolerant, productive, and adaptive), and beside that supported by the ability to utilize information and communicate. The 21st century education also directs learners to be life-long learner.

Based on the "Core 21st Century Skills", there are several competencies and expertise that 21st century human resources need to have on language education, including: communication and collaboration skill (able to communicate and collaborate effectively with various parties) ; Information and Communications Technology Literacy (able to utilize information and communication technology to improve daily performance and activities); and Information and Media Literacy Skills (are able to understand and use various communication media to convey ideas and carry out collaborative activities and interactions with various parties). Such competence and expertise implies that language education is important to be mastered as early as possible.

Language Education as a multidisciplinary field is a core of Indonesian language education, regional languages, and foreign languages. Specifically, language education is an important tenet of language comprehension, which aims to further understand the meaning and role of the language. Recommendation from UNESCO states that language education policy can be (a) study of

language centre and other resource management in transfer of technology and science owned by developed countries; (b) utilization of mother tongue in learning as a mean to improve the quality of education built on the knowledge and experience of students and teachers; (c) support Bilingual and / or Multi Lingual education at all levels of education as a tool for promoting gender and social equality and as a key element of a diverse society linguistically; (d) supporting language as an essential component of cross-cultural education to awaken understanding among different population groups and ensure respect for human rights.

At last, it can be imply that language education is the primary education or competence that must be mastered in the development and progress of education, especially education of the 21st century. Progress of language education of a country can be judged from the character of a nation through its citizens. Damage to the use of language is one indicator of the destruction of a nation's character. With the improvement of language education, the development of human resources can run optimally. Improved language education should be in line between universal language acquisition and national language preservation.

2. Language Education in Facing MEA

The implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community (MEA) has been ongoing since January 2016. It means that the international market opportunity in ASEAN is available. Countries that belong to ASEAN, as a part of countries in the world, cannot escape the flow of globalization. All will enter the vortex of world dynamics: cultural, politics, security, as well as economic. Soh, Arsyad & Osman (2010) assert that the 21st century can be regarded as the century of knowledge - a century marked by the massive transformation of agrarian society into industrial society and continuing into a knowledge society. The process of transformation is also marked by the occurrence of a set of social and cultural changes of society due to the emergence of globalization and the rapid flow of information. Irwansyah (2013) says that in the context of an increasingly globalized world, interaction among nations will impact on language, culture, and even ideology interactions. The impact of language is that there is an opportunity in which a foreign language dominates the heritage language, especially in certain contexts such as the use of key terms, scientific discussions, and so on.

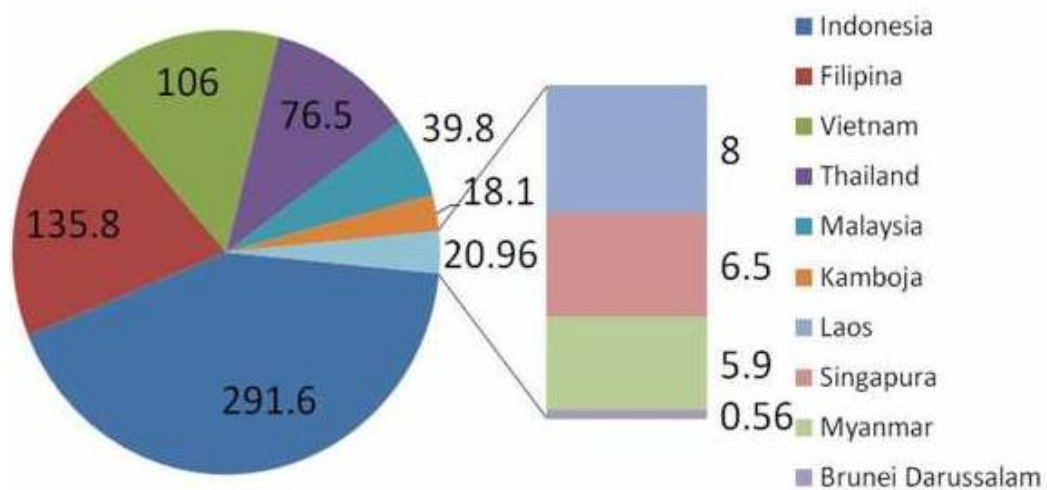
Comrie (2005) proposed the term heritage language, dominant language, and language shift as one of the impacts of the phenomenon of globalization and multiculturalism. A society that

originally used a single language (monolingual) and embraced a common culture (monocultural) may experience a multicultural phenomenon as a result of interaction with other communities. In a context in which the heritage language can be preserved properly, a foreign language will only give "colour" or variation to the original language. Conversely, if the original language does not get a good place in the day-to-day discourse, the foreign language is transformed into a dominant language, so that language shift occurs because foreign languages are used more often than the original language. Language transitions can result in certain language extinctions. It is estimated that in the next century, 3000 to 5000 languages out of approximately 6000 languages are currently in use, threatened with extinction. Those languages may not be passed on to future generations. Related to this, it is possible that Indonesian and Malay languages will be extinct if there is no conscious effort to preserve it. Although the reality proves that Malay is the dominant language used in ASEAN countries.

Research conducted by Yarno (2016) asserted that the existence of Indonesian and Malay language cannot be ignored. Malay language users among ASEAN member countries reach about 400 million people. Moreover, Malay is recorded as a national language in four countries, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei,

and Singapore. Meanwhile, in some other countries, such as Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and the Philippines, Malay became the second and third languages. Considering the importance of Malay language, other countries, such as Australia, also put language used by ASEAN countries in their educational curriculum. Therefore, some experts have called for an

invitation to use Malay in ASEAN communication. By 2015 the total population in ASEAN is about 688 million people. Of that number, Indonesian and / or Malay speakers reach 400 million people. This amount is equal to 58 percent of the total population of ASEAN citizens. For more details can be seen in the following figure:



Picture 1: Distribution of Malay user in various ASEAN countries

Based on the picture, it can be seen that although the Malay language is the dominant language in ASEAN countries, each country is also encouraged to master the universal language, depending on the policy of each country. Balancing the use of universal language with the national language is an important effort in showing the national identity. Thus, all stakeholders should contribute to maintaining, preserving, developing, and improving the national language.

The flow of globalization, marked by the operation of the MEA requires a country to improve the quality of human resources, in order to produce internationally qualified graduates equipped with professional skills, nation character, language skills, and cultural skills. In line with 21st century education, the main competencies that need to be improved dealing with MEA are language skills and education, which are generally very useful to facilitate the process of negotiating between countries through communication channels. The similarity of communication will facilitate in the mixing and association. Handayani (2016) also explained that entering the era of globalization or better known as the free market requires every individual to prepare himself with adequate knowledge, especially in the field of communication.

Apart from being a communication tool of bilateral and multilateral relations, language also serves as a unifying tool of nation and state. Therefore, the use of universal language between countries does not have to remove the national language.

The national language has an important role in realizing a unity and independence. The Indonesian state which has hundreds of ethnic and regional languages can be a unitary state because there is a national language that unites it. Thus, the preservation of the national language in the era of MEA will take precedence, although every citizen is required to be able to master the universal language. Kridalaksana (2001: 197) explains that the powerlessness of a national language is basically due to the attitude of the owner of the language itself. The attitude of language is a mental position or feeling towards the language itself or the language of others.

It is undeniable that the MEA has an impact on changing language and culture, but this can be overcome by the common commitment of all citizens to uphold the national language. Particularly in Indonesia, Indonesian has become the national language of the country. The Indonesian government has also established a strong legal basis, namely with the enactment of *UU No. 24 year 2009* about Flags, Languages, and Symbol of the Country, as well as the National Anthem. The law is a mandate of *pasal 36 UUD Negara Republik Indonesia year 1945* and the realization of *Sumpah Pemuda* October 28, 1928.

Thus the current MEA challenges do not need to be feared. Growing and increasing the mastery of universal language by every citizen will not affect the extinction of the national language, if each country is able to preserve the national language and

put the national language as national identity. Therefore, it is expected that a country can direct its citizens to be able to improve the ability of the universal language and to preserve the national language through language education

Conclusion

Language education is an important thing that cannot be eliminated in human civilization. Language education plays an important role in all aspects of life of nations and states. The character of a nation can be determined from the language. The progress of Science and Technology provides strong motivation for each country to be able to develop and improve language education. The development and improvement of language education, especially the universal language must be accompanied by the preservation of the national language as the identity of a nation.

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