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TOWARD GLOBALIZATION: AN INDONESIAN EXPERIENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

English language is acknowledged as a foreign language in Indonesia. Since the nation's independence, it has been taught in secondary and tertiary education levels and later on, even in primary level, due to increasing demand of the skills in international communication. Globalization that reduced country borders and gave way to interconnectedness has given more opportunities to the people in the global world, provided that they have English language skill proficiency. How has Indonesia prepared its students in the mastery of the language and how is the teaching of the language in Indonesia? Indonesian secondary and tertiary education institutions need competent teachers to help the students learn the language. This paper will therefore discuss, with the status of English language in Indonesia, how does Indonesia prepare the students for the globalization, in terms of language teaching and how collaboration and innovation in language teaching play important roles in strengthening English language teaching in Indonesia, especially as the country seeks to prepare students for global competitiveness. To answer the questions, a descriptive qualitative method is used to explore Indonesia's experience in English language teaching and the results show that since Indonesia is a large country, with a massive number of secondary and tertiary education institutions, collaboration and innovation may help the country in English language teaching. While collaboration creates a supportive environment for teachers, innovation supports teachers in staying engaged and responsive in the challenging global era.

Keywords: English teaching, globalization, innovation, collaboration

Abstrak

Bahasa Inggris adalah Bahasa asing di Indonesia dan sejak kemerdekaan pembelajaran bahasa asing ini dipelajari di sekolah menengah dan pendidikan tinggi. Namun, karena kebutuhan komunikasi global, bahasa Inggris bahkan dipelajari di sekolah dasar. Globalisasi yang mengikis batas negara telah membuka sekat antarbangsa dan membuka lebih banyak peluang bagi masyarakat dunia, yang memiliki minimal kecakapan berbahasa internasional. Mengingat pentingnya posisi bahasa Inggris di dunia, bagaimana Indonesia mempersiapkan peserta didiknya dan bagaimana pelaksanaan pengajaran bahasa Inggris di Indonesia dengan pengajar yang kompeten perlu dipertimbangkan dalam persiapan tersebut. Makalah ini akan membahas bagaimana Indonesia mempersiapkan peserta didik dalam menghadapi globalisasi, khususnya dalam hal penguasaan bahasa Inggris, serta peran kolaborasi dan inovasi pencapaian tujuan pembelajarannya. Metode yang digunakan dalam pembahasan adalah metode deskriptif kualitatif yang digunakan untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman Indonesia dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa karena Indonesia merupakan negara yang luas dengan jumlah sekolah yang sangat besar, kolaborasi dan inovasi dapat menjadi solusi dalam pemerataan pengajaran bahasa Inggris. Kolaborasi menciptakan lingkungan yang saling mendukung bagi para guru, sementara inovasi membantu pengajar untuk tetap relevan dan responsif dalam menghadapi tantangan era global.

Kata kunci: Pengajaran bahasa Inggris, globalisasi, inovasi, kolaborasi

1. Introduction

English is the first international language in Indonesia. It is taught in every level of education, from primary to tertiary level. The introduction of English as a foreign language in Indonesia is due to the fact that Indonesia acknowledged Bahasa Indonesia as the national language, declared by the youth organization in the Youth Pledge in 1928. The status of English is therefore a foreign language following the declaration. However, the teaching of a foreign language was obligatory because Indonesia needed it for international communication. Therefore, since Indonesia's independence in 1945, English has been officially taught and included in the national curriculum for junior high schools and senior high schools (Lee, 2023). Later on, English was declared the first foreign language in Indonesian secondary schools, as stated in the decree, to provide students with a "functional understanding of English" (Maya & Iskandar, 2022).

The position of English as the first foreign language in Indonesia is formally put into the curriculum in junior and senior high schools, as a compulsory course, and in some cases, in primary education level, as an elective course or part of the institutional curriculum. Internationally affiliated schools, however, are allowed to use English as a medium of communication and as an education language. The use of English as the medium of communication confers a social status (Nghia et al., 2024) (Chua, 2022). In Indonesia, the use of English in general has always been prioritized when it comes to the learning of foreign languages, as Lauder puts it, "[English] is presently the only foreign language which is a compulsory subject in schools (Lauder, 2008). Other foreign languages, like French, Chinese, or Japanese, if offered, are electives." Some schools even boast that they offer English as a compulsory foreign language and many elective foreign languages are in the curriculum, with Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and French as the top choices of the students, depending on the trend, sometimes. Furthermore, Rosemary Salomone adds that English accounts for 60 percent of the world's internet content and is the lingua franca of pop culture and the global economy. All 100 of the world's most influential science journals publish in English. "Across Europe, close to 100 percent of students study English at some point in their education" (Chua, 2022).

Mastering English undoubtedly provides access to a wide range of opportunities in today's globalized world. Globalization itself can be understood as the increasing connectedness and interdependence among nations, cultures, and economies, which makes English proficiency an essential tool for individuals to actively engage and compete in this global era. As argued by Crystal, "language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country." Further, he adds, "To achieve such a status,

a language has to be taken up by other countries around the world. They must decide to give it a special place within their communities, even though they may have few (or no) mother-tongue speakers.” (Crystal, 2003).

In light of the above, this paper will therefore discuss, with the status of the English language in Indonesia, how Indonesia prepares the students for globalization, in terms of language teaching. The question is based on the fact that Indonesia is a big country, with a population of 283 million in 2024 (“Worldometer,” 2024). A massive number of secondary and tertiary education institutions, 42,907 junior secondary schools, 14,573 senior secondary schools, and 14,641 vocational high schools (Dataindonesia.id, 2023) and at the tertiary level, Indonesia has 4,416 institutions (Kemdiktisaintek, 2025b). The above figure raises another question of how collaboration and innovation in language teaching play important roles in language teaching as Indonesia prepares for globalization.

2. Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method to explore Indonesia’s experience in English language teaching. The method allows for a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the challenges of English language teaching in capturing the complexity of language teaching in the Indonesian context. Through descriptive analysis, the study also allows for examining how history and policies influence English language education in Indonesia in the nation’s journey in developing its English language teaching practices by innovative efforts and collaboration, particularly in adapting to the opportunities and demands in the digital era.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Indonesia: Preparing for the Global World

Globalization is understood as the world becoming one. The word is actually “used to describe the growing interdependence of the world’s economies, cultures, and populations, brought about by cross-border trade in goods and services, technology, and flows of investment, people, and information”. which started actually with the inventions of the steam ships, railroads, and the telegraph that connected the people rapidly (*Pietersen Institute for International Economics*, 2018). Although globalization intensifies competition, it simultaneously generates new job opportunities for skilled workers. These opportunities extend beyond the presence of multinational companies operating within the Indonesian market, as globalization also facilitates broader access for Indonesians to pursue employment overseas. It is an undeniable fact that there is a need for a common language

to communicate with the present growing commerce and trade between companies it is also undeniable that one of the requirements of those who wish to work in international market is the language that will enable people to understand each other when they work. To date, English still serves as the language that is mostly used to communicate in the workplace, although more languages are emerging as means of communication in international settings. English will still be the language of technology, economics, and academic dominance (Crystal, 2003).

For Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous nation ("Worldometer," 2024) and a rapidly developing economy. The openness experienced by Indonesia, particularly in the 1990s, has benefited its development in the last few decades (Verico & Pangestu, 2020). The most strategic preparation Indonesia has done is particularly through the teaching of English as the international lingua franca. By strengthening language proficiency, Indonesia seeks to ensure that its people are capable of accessing global knowledge, engaging in international collaboration, and seizing broader opportunities in the global marketplace.

The data that Education First (EF) collected from its EF Standard English Test (SET) is very interesting because the index provides an overall idea of the popularity of English globally. From the 2023 SET results, the English proficiency of citizens from 116 countries, twelve countries had very high English Proficiency Index scores of 600 or greater. The highest score was the Netherlands with 647, and the lowest was 449 or lower. The country that had the lowest score was the Democratic Republic of the Congo with a score of 385. Indonesia scores 473, in fourth place, after Singapore (631), the Philippines (578), and Malaysia (568), and tenth of 15 Asian countries in the index ("EF English Proficiency," 2025).

For many Indonesians, the primary motivation to study English lies in its role as a language of opportunity (Crystal, 2003). English proficiency is often associated with aspirations to travel abroad, work in multinational companies, and, without a doubt, to secure better economic prospects. With mastery of English, a wider opportunity for global employment is opened, or it enhances one's competitiveness in the global market (Nghia et al., 2024). Professionals with strong English skills tend to have greater flexibility to work across borders and are more likely to be considered for international assignments or career advancements. EF Test results also show that "economically, countries that had higher English proficiency correlated positively with human capital, global innovation, talent competitiveness, and productivity." ("EF English Proficiency," 2025)

3.2. English Teaching in Indonesia

Like many non-English speaking countries, English is taught in all levels of education, from elementary to tertiary education in Indonesia, as the first foreign language. Other foreign languages, such as Mandarin, Japanese, French, etc. may also be in the curriculum as a second foreign language and/or elective.

Table 1. English Teaching from Time to Time at Elementary- Senior High School Level

No.	Curriculum	Level	Elementary School (ES)	Junior High School (JHS)	Senior High School (SHS)
1	K.1947	JHS-SHS		4 hrs/week	2-3 hrs/week
2	K.1958	JHS-SHS		4 hrs/week	3-4 hrs/week
3	K.1964	JHS-SHS		4 hrs/week	3-4 hrs/week
4	K.1968	JHS-SHS		4 hrs/week	3-4 hrs/week
5	K.1975	JHS-SHS		4 hrs/week	3-7 hrs/week
6	K.1984	JHS-SHS		4 hrs/week	3-7 hrs/week
7	K.1994	JHS-SHS		4 hrs/week	4-6 hrs/week
8	KBK 2004	ES-SHS	2 hrs/week	4 hrs/week	4-6 hrs/week
9	KTSP 2006	ES-SHS	2 hrs/week	4 hrs/week	4-5 hrs/week
10	K.2013	JHS-SHS		4 hrs/week	2 hrs/week

(Alfarisy, 2021)

The above table shows that the time allocation for the English language course is around 5% of the curriculum. The English course in the elementary school did not start before 2004, with 2 hours/week, just enough for an introduction to the language. The teaching of English in elementary school was no longer compulsory in the 2013 curriculum. The inclusion of English in the junior and senior high school curriculum is not only to help students acquire basic communication skills, but also to equip them with the linguistic and cultural competence needed in a globalized world. As globalization increases interaction across nations in fields such as education, business, science, and technology, the inclusion of English in the secondary curriculum is important. This allocation of credit units in the table indicates that English teaching across curricula has not been substantial enough to foster strong language proficiency. The limited exposure—the average of 4 hours weekly—is not sufficient for learning the four essential skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This creates a mismatch between global needs and curriculum design, which partly explains Indonesia’s relatively low ranking in international measures of English proficiency.

In the tertiary level, however, the national curriculum does not include English as compulsory, but almost all institutions put it in the curriculum, whose load varies depending on the purpose of English subject teaching. In the tertiary level, English proficiency is even more important because as a global language, English is taught for academic purposes. Students are expected to be engaged with academic world whose textbooks or journals are written in English. The language also provides students with the opportunity to be involved in academic meetings or joint research an international level. Aside from that, English is taught for professional preparation for the students because it is considered key employability in many industries, in local, regional and even international markets.

Therefore, without a strong foundation in the English language from secondary school, students often struggle to adapt to the demands of university-level study, which in turn limits their capacity to perform well and benefit fully from higher education.

3.3. Collaboration and Innovation in English Language Learning

In 2024, there are around 10.1 million junior high school students and about 10 million senior high school or vocational high school students (Table 2). The minimum three hours per week for students living in the urban areas who are more exposed to English context may be sufficient, but a maximum of 6 hours/week for students living far from adequate or state-of-the-art learning facilities in the less privileged area or in the remote coastal areas is definitely not sufficient to learn English.

Table 2: The number of students in Elementary to Higher Education in Indonesia

In 2024	Number of institutions	Number of students
Elementary school	149.034	23.998.432
Junior high school	43.098	10.103.503
Senior high school	14.675	5.400.167
Senior vocational high school	14.325	5.066.424
Higher Education institutions (under MoHE Science and Tech.)	4.418	9.967.487

Source: Indonesian Bureau of Statistics (<https://www.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/> and <https://pddikti.kemdiktisaintek.go.id/>)

There are 71.941 high schools (41.986 junior high schools, 14.575 senior high schools, and 14,461 vocational high schools) in Indonesia, which need at least the same number of English teachers with a minimum qualification of *Sarjana* or Bachelor's degree in English Language or English Language Education. There appears to be an insufficient number of qualified and or certified English teachers, particularly in remote and rural areas. This creates a significant challenge for the nation, as English remains a critical subject that needs to be taught at least in secondary education. The English Proficiency Index indicates that Indonesia still lags behind many other countries in terms of English competency. Without adequate exposure to English and systematic instruction from trained teachers, students will not succeed in competing in today's global era. Consequently, addressing this shortage of English teachers is not only an educational issue but also a national priority to ensure that Indonesia produces a competent and globally competitive workforce after they complete their higher education.

Realizing the challenge of English language teaching in Indonesia, collaboration and innovation can play a very significant role. Given the fact of unequal access to resources and varying teacher competencies across regions, collaboration and innovation may become a solution.

3.3.1. Collaboration

Collaboration, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, is the situation of two or more people working together to achieve the same thing. In teaching, collaboration plays a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of teaching, including English teaching, in Indonesia. Collaborative practices enable teachers to exchange teaching materials, methodologies, and even innovative approaches to enrich classroom resources. A very good example of collaboration that is fostered in Indonesia is the Teacher Working Group or the KKG--*Kelompok Kerja Guru* in elementary education level and the Subject Teachers Assembly or the MGMP--*Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran* at the junior and senior high school levels. Both teacher working groups share lesson plans, develop teaching materials, and discuss effective strategies for classroom instruction. For example, English teachers can collaborate to design learning programs and create standardized assessments. Collaboration also allows teachers to exchange or be mentors to those from other institutions. They can learn from one another and gain exposure to new pedagogical innovations, for example. For example, MGMP's members are allowed to even teach in schools that have an insufficient number of English teachers or mentor

junior teachers in their teaching. Thus, collaboration will foster professional development of English teachers and create a supportive professional community that reduces isolation, builds confidence, and fosters a culture of shared responsibility.

Another strategy is to collaborate with higher education institutions, particularly with those that have English or English language study programs. Collaboration between schools and higher education institutions that have English studies/teaching/literature/culture study program(s) can be established. In the frame of the *Kampus Berdampak* (impactful campus) program, the continuation program of the previous MBKM (Freedom to Learn, Independent Campus) can help schools in the provision of teachers of English as a foreign language. The involvement of senior students in the elementary/secondary schools aims at improving the English language skills of the students. This collaboration can also be aimed at upskilling English language teachers in the form of workshops, training or conferences. Higher education institutions will always be present in society as a beacon of civilization, illuminating the path, uniting hopes, and serving as a space for the growth of change (Kemdiktisaintek, 2025a). This program will definitely accelerate English teaching in the secondary schools in Indonesia. Another institutional collaboration with the Association of English Studies in Indonesia can also be pursued. Collaboration with the English Studies Association in Indonesia (ESAI) and the English Language Education Study Program Association (ELESIPA) can be pursued due to their wide coverage in Indonesia. Almost all English study programs in Indonesia belong to either one or both of them. With collaboration, higher education institutions can extend their community services to the schools of their respective neighbourhoods,

3.3.2. Innovation

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the way we think of online learning. We are forced to teach online (whether synchronous or asynchronous) and use online language learning platforms as alternatives. The COVID-19 Pandemic that hit us hard has taught us that language learning in a virtual classroom is not impossible. Language teachers who used to believe that classroom interaction or face-to-face interaction is the best method when it comes to language learning have changed their minds. Virtual learning showed that teaching and learning can take place beyond the classroom, offering opportunities for more self-paced and independent learning. Digital language learning platforms are also available. They have significantly transformed the way English is

learned and taught by offering accessibility, flexibility, and interactivity that traditional classrooms often cannot provide. Many platforms also provide interactive exercises that make learning engaging and they are also adaptable to different learning styles. In short, digital platforms support English learning by combining accessibility, interactivity, personalization, and global connectivity, making language education more effective and relevant in the digital age. BBC Learning English, as part of the BBC World Service, “has been teaching English to global audiences since 1943, offering free audio, video and text materials to learners around the world.” (“BBC Learning English,” n.d.). Duolingo, with its motto, learn anytime, anywhere, as Britannica claims, is known for its gamified approach to language learning and its wide accessibility. It is the most famous language application worldwide, with more than 100 million monthly users (*Duolingo*, 2025). There are many other digital platforms for English language learning.

However, aside from technology-based innovation, another interesting innovation in language learning is alternative approaches to language teaching, concerning Indonesia’s geographical condition. As the world’s largest archipelagic country, Indonesia consists of more than 17,000 islands, many of which are located in remote or rural areas that are difficult to reach. This creates unequal access to internet infrastructure and digital devices between urban centers and peripheral regions. These geographical disparities result in many students in remote areas being left behind, relying mainly on traditional teaching methods. This is where the teacher’s innovative teaching approaches are crucial. Rural schools may involve local culture in the reading materials because learning something that is close to their everyday life is easier to learn. Again, this innovative approach requires a capable resource.

4. Conclusion

Globalization is an inevitable phenomenon that requires every nation, including Indonesia, to prepare its citizens to participate actively in a highly interconnected world. Within this context, the teaching and learning of English remain highly significant, particularly in Indonesia’s multicultural and multilingual setting, where diverse regional needs and challenges must be addressed. Given that Indonesia is the largest archipelagic country in the world, there is an urgent need for a breakthrough in English language teaching that can bridge geographical disparities and provide equal access to quality instruction across different regions.

Both collaboration and innovation are indispensable pillars in strengthening English language teaching in Indonesia. Collaboration enables teachers to share resources, exchange pedagogical practices, and support one another through professional forums such as KKG and MGMP, as well as through partnerships with higher education institutions and professional associations. These networks not only improve instructional quality but also foster continuous professional development, creating a supportive community of practice that reduces teacher isolation. At the same time, innovation ensures that English teaching remains relevant and adaptive to changing circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the potential of digital platforms in making learning more accessible, interactive, and flexible, while also highlighting the need for alternative, context-specific strategies for schools in geographically remote areas. Taken together, collaboration and innovation provide a synergistic framework for enhancing the quality, inclusivity, and sustainability of English education across Indonesia's diverse educational landscape.

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