

# USING ENGLISH TO ENHANCE THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' SENSE OF NATIONALISM

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## Abstract

*English is an international language and is used worldwide. Hence, it must be mastered by anyone who would like to interact and succeed internationally. Learning English is very important to do since early ages (more specifically since elementary school) to have better result. Unfortunately the government has made unpopular decision by removing English subject from the elementary school curriculum because of its potential to reduce the students' sense of nationalism. In fact, there is no scientific evidence that prove learning English in early age can only reduce the students' sense of nationalism. Indonesian people have been for long time dealing with foreign languages such as Arabic, Dutch, and Japanese. But the nationalism of Indonesian people in general remains high. In short, there is no need to remove this subject from the curriculum. Teaching English is actually can be used to raise the sense of nationalism. At least there are two ways that can be applied: internalization of nationalism values into the teaching materials and using songs of nationalism. Through these techniques it is expected that not only the children's English but also their sense of nationalism will increase.*

*Keywords: English, nationalism, internalization of values, nationalism songs*

## Abstrak

*Bahasa Inggris adalah bahasa internasional dan digunakan di seluruh dunia. Oleh karena itu, ia harus dikuasai oleh siapapun yang ingin berinteraksi dan meraih kesuksesan secara internasional. Belajar bahasa Inggris sangat penting dilakukan sejak usia dini (lebih khusus lagi sejak SD) agar hasilnya lebih baik. Sayangnya pemerintah telah membuat keputusan yang tidak populer dengan menghapus pelajaran bahasa Inggris dari kurikulum sekolah dasar karena berpotensi mengurangi rasa nasionalisme siswa. Padahal, tidak ada bukti ilmiah yang membuktikan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di usia dini bisa mengurangi rasa nasionalisme siswa. Orang Indonesia telah lama berurusan dengan bahasa asing seperti bahasa Arab, Belanda, dan Jepang. Tapi nasionalisme masyarakat Indonesia pada umumnya tetap tinggi. Singkatnya, tidak perlu mengeluarkan mata pelajaran Bahasa Inggris dari kurikulum. Pengajaran bahasa Inggris sebenarnya bisa digunakan untuk meningkatkan rasa nasionalisme. Setidaknya ada dua cara yang bisa diterapkan: internalisasi nilai nasionalisme ke dalam bahan ajar dan menggunakan lagu nasionalisme. Melalui dua cara ini diharapkan tidak hanya bahasa Inggris anak-anak yang meningkat tetapi juga rasa nasionalisme mereka.*

*Kata kunci: bahasa Inggris, nasionalisme, internalisasi nilai, lagu nasionalisme*

## A. Introduction

English is an internationally used language and is an official language of some international organizations such as the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee as well as the official language in many countries such as Hong Kong, Ireland, Canada, Philippines, South Africa, Singapore, and others. In Indonesia, English is the first foreign language to learn after the mother tongues (Bahasa Indonesia and local languages).

Considering the official position of English as an international language, it is imperative to us to study and understand English well if we do not want to lag behind the others, especially other countries. By studying and understanding English language well, we will be able to interact easily with many people around the world. However, to get better result of learning English, it is better to be done in early ages.

Unfortunately in Indonesia, the policy of teaching English as a foreign language changes over time. The changes of policy are commonly influenced by the economic and political factors. One of debatable policies is the removal of English subject from elementary school curriculum. This decision raises a variety of comments from various circles, including the parents. Many of them criticized this policy because English, in their opinion, will be more easily taught and learnt by children in early age.

The government's removal decision was based on several considerations. First, it is because the English subject is considered too burdensome to student. So far the students at the basic education level learnt 12 subjects. Such burden, according to the curriculum designer, aggravated the students and did not support the effective students' learning activities. Second, the elimination

of teaching English at a basic level aims at giving time to the elementary school students to strengthen their Bahasa Indonesia mastery before learning a foreign language. According to Kunjana, a sociolinguist from University of Gajah Mada, "a good mastery of the mother tongue will be very helpful when the children learn the second and third language" (<http://www.voaindonesia.com/a/orangtua-pertanyaan-penghapusan-bahasa-inggris-dari-sd/1525230.html>). Kunjana further explains that before learning a foreign language it is better for a student to learn their mother tongue in advance to avoid later confusion in understanding the mother tongues, both Bahasa Indonesia and local languages. Third, the removal of the English subject is due to social responsibility issues. The fact is that children tend to be more interested in learning English than Bahasa Indonesia so that their English mastery is often better than that of Bahasa Indonesia.

In addition, another key issue underlying the deletion policy is that teaching English in elementary schools will only weaken the students' nationalism. This is the issue I would like to emphasize in this article. By learning English it is feared that the students would lose their identity as Indonesian. Even worse, they will be more familiar with foreign cultures than their own culture so that their behavior will become westernized.

Based on the issues outlined above, this article will discuss the government's removal policy of English subject in elementary schools. Indeed, the removal does cause a lot of pros and cons. Not only the parents but also many English practitioners criticize this policy. They hope the government reconsiders the advantages and disadvantages of the removal policy. The government should not just put forward reactionary emotional-considerations

without considering in depth the advantages that could be larger. The rational, scientific, and measurable reasons should be put forward before making decisions so that curriculum will not change every time the minister changes.

If the main concern is the weakening of students' sense of nationalism, there is no need to remove English from the curriculum of elementary school. The most important thing to consider is how to make English subject become an effective medium to raise the students' sense of nationalism. Therefore this article will discuss the position of English in Indonesia, the relationship between English and nationalism, the importance of teaching English from early ages, and some ideas of teaching English that can be applied in elementary schools to boost the students' sense of nationalism.

## **B. The position of English in Indonesia**

English language in Indonesia is generally taught as a foreign language (FL). The term 'foreign language' in the field of language teaching is different from that of 'second language'. "Foreign language is a language that is not used as a means of communication in certain countries where the language is taught. While a second language is a language that is not the primary language, but it becomes one of the languages commonly used in the country" ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second\\_language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_language)). In Hong Kong, for example, English is considered as the second language (SL). The mass media, communication, and formal discussion in the country are often conducted in English.

On the other hand, foreign language (FL) is a subject to be taught in schools. The main purpose of teaching is to make the students master the four language skills

(speaking, listening, reading, writing) in order to be able to communicate in basic English within certain period of time. However many students learn English just for passing the exams as a necessary part of their education. Some students study English for their career progression, and some of them study it to run their business with an international focus.

## **C. The relationship between English and Nationalism**

Language serves as a means of thought and expression as well as a means of communication. Language as a means of thought can lead people to act orderly and politely. As a means of expression language leads its user to a creative atmosphere, because language is a means of disclosing thoughts about science, technology and art to establish intelligence. Language as a means of communication creates an atmosphere of intimacy and togetherness that ultimately fosters a familial relationship. Thus, language shapes the patterns of thought, behavior, creativity, and foster a sense of togetherness and solidarity.

If nationalism is defined as an idea related to creating and maintaining the sovereignty of a nation by realizing the common identity, so where is the connection between nationalism and language? Is it true that nationalism is marked by the people's love of their own language? Is it true that the phrase "language identifies the nation" shows a relevant significance between nationalism and language?

If a language marks a nation and the existence of a language is because the people use it, so the nation and language have strong relationship. However, the problem is that in fact, in sociolinguistic point of view, not every nation has a language of unity that "identifies the nation". There are some nations that use multiple languages. There are also some

nations that have one language as the national language, but it is not their own language – not from the native language of the nations. There are also nations that use a certain language as the official communication language, but the language is also used by several other nations (Harimansyah, 2012).

In nowadays era, those who can only speak or understands one language will have difficulty fitting in a global competition. Moreover, Indonesia is categorized as a developing country that still needs help and contributions from other countries, especially the developed ones. Language development is heavily influenced by the times and other countries. Many countries want to develop their own language as the languages that can be recognized by all parties throughout the world (Harimansyah, 2012).

In connection with such sociolinguistic facts, a question arises. Is the nationalism of the people of the United States, Canada, Singapore, Hong Kong or even Malaysia questionable just because they use the language that is not their own? If nationalism in a narrow sense is defined as the pride of the country, we have no right to judge anyone on it. In the case of Bahasa Indonesia, for example, when an Indonesian speaks Bahasa Indonesia with American accent, just because his father is an American or because he lived for a long time in that country, does it mean that he does not love Indonesia? Likewise, it cannot be guaranteed for sure one hundred percent that people living in the territory of Indonesia and speak Bahasa Indonesia very fluently and excellently are proud of Indonesia. Pride and love are in our hearts. Language or accent of a person does not show the level of nationalism.

There were some historical evidences that language has nothing to do with people's sense of nationalism. Indonesian people have proved it. Foreign languages have been familiar with us since the 7th century when the Chinese merchants had a trade in Riau, West Kalimantan and East Kalimantan, even North Maluku. At the era of the kingdom of Srivijaya, China opened diplomatic relations with it in order to secure its trade and seafaring. Around the year 922, some Chinese traveler visited Kahuripan in East Java. Since the 11th century hundreds of thousands of migrants leaved their ancestral lands and settled in many parts of Nusantara (Archipelago). The long contact with the Chinese resulted in the acquisition of loan words from the Chinese language (e.g., "bakso", "giwang", and "tahu").

One other evidence that foreign languages do not have significant effect on the people's sense of nationalism is the fact that Arabic was once very dominant in this country. Up to now, many students have studied this language since elementary school age (in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) and even pre-school (in Raudhatul Athfal). Do they lose their nationalism? Absolutely not. Their nationalism remains high even though they are very fluent in speaking Arabic language.

Arabic was first brought to Indonesia in the seventh century by the merchants from Persia, India, and Arabia who were also the propagators of Islam. The Arabic language, which is also the language of Islam, has influenced Malay language since the 12th century when many kings embraced Islam. As a result many words were taken or borrowed from Arabic language. The words taken from Arabic language were, for example, *ahad*, *abdi*, *adat*, *adil*, *hadiah*, *hakim*, *taat*, and *ilmu*. Moreover because

many of the merchants were from Persia, many Persian vocabulary came into Malay language, such as *acar, bala, bandar, cadar, piala, saudagar, geram, and ramal*.

In addition to Arabic and Persian, the Dutch language was once very dominant in this country. The Dutch controlled this country for more than 350 years, and many Indonesian people studied Dutch language at that time. Even many indigenous children went to study in Netherlands. However, the sense of nationalism of the people was not faded. They still found themselves as Indonesian people.

The Dutch came to this country in the early 17th century when they drove the Portuguese out of the Moluccas in 1606. They then headed to the island of Java and other areas in the west. Since then, the Dutch gradually controlled some areas in Indonesia. The occupation became wider covering almost every area in Nusantara for a long time of period (350 years of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia). Dutch language was also the major means for the movement group to study. Therefore the language used by the political figures at that time was mainly Dutch, and many words like *ajudan, erosi, dongkrak, dosen, ember, montir, tekor, and sirsak* were taken from Dutch vocabulary.

Japanese language was also very influential in Indonesia, especially during the Japanese occupation. Japanese occupation in Indonesia that lasted for three and a half years did not leave a legacy of words that can survive for several generations. The Japanese words that insert into the vocabulary of Bahasa Indonesia commonly deal with technology.

Indeed, there are some negative and positif effects of foreign languages over

Bahasa Indonesia. The negative influences of foreign languages on the development of Bahasa Indonesia are many, for example: (1) Children begin to be reluctant to learn Bahasa Indonesia, (2) Indonesian people increasingly over time forget that Bahasa Indonesia is the language of unity, (3) The children begin to be unwilling to read the passages written in Bahasa Indonesia, (4) Over time Indonesian people will have difficulty to write or speak in good Bahasa Indonesia, and (5) They can lose the Indonesian people's pride of their own language and culture (Danie, 2013).

On the other hand, some positive impacts of foreign languages over children's language development are: (1) The foreign language can enhance the child's language acquisition, (2) People that are able to communicate in English will have big chances to learn better because many scientific sources are written in English (Danie, 2013). Children can get two or more languages properly if there is a consistent pattern of social communication, such as with whom to speak what language, where to speak what language, or when to speak what language (Danie, 2013), and this kind of habit must be formed since early ages.

#### **D. The need for teaching English in elementary school**

Taking into consideration that there is no scientific correlation between English and the weakening of the students' sense of nationalism, the teaching of English in elementary schools is essential to be done. There are many interesting facts underlying the importance of English language teaching since early age. Here are some of them.

We all know that English is used internationally. This means that people who come from diverse geographical, religion and cultural backgrounds have a medium to be used to communicate with each other, namely English. So if you want to be an

insightful and knowledgeable person, English is the language that is very important to learn. English gives us breathing space to dissolve into a part of the global community. Even on specific areas English is absolutely indispensable. Therefore, it is essential that elementary school teachers introduce English to their students as early age as possible. With the right method of teaching, learning English will be fun for the children.

From the psychological point of view, English is easier to be learnt by young children. Elementary school students aged 7-12 years old are in the phase of so called "middle childhood". This phase becomes the golden period for learning a language other than their mother tongues (first language). The condition of the brain is still plastic and pliable which facilitates the absorption of language being learned. According to Piaget (1954), children at the age of 7-12 years old come into the concrete operational stage, in which children can think logically about different objects but are still limited in terms of concrete things. Areas of the brain that govern language skills develop most rapidly when children aged 7-12 years old, which is also known as critical periods.

David Singleton (2003) states that learning a second language is easier to be done in the long run. This implies that very young learners will learn a second language (e.g., English) easier and better than the 'late' learners. This is because children are still in the critical period, making them easier to accept something. The cognitive, creative, and divergent thinking are in optimal condition so that biologically it is the great time to learn a foreign language. Divergent thinking is a theory proposed by J.P. Guilford in 1956 (wikipedia.com) in which the children's way of thinking in the middle childhood phase has spread away. It means the children do not only focus on one

thing, rather they could see things from different sides at once.

As an international language, it is essential that English be taught to early age children. Even in some kindergarten, very young students have already been taught very basic English lessons. Commonly kindergarten children are taught English vocabulary through English songs although the lyrics sometimes mixed between Bahasa Indonesia and English. They are often asked to memorize numbers and colors in English. English subject in elementary school is indeed necessary. Once they pass the elementary school and go to a higher level, they have already got the foundation to learn English well. Teaching English since early age is very valuable to create Indonesian human resources that are ready to face the era of globalization and can compete with other people around the world.

Learning English from early age will create a habituation to speak and read English. Teaching English since early age will make the children better trained in English language without ignoring the native language (Bahasa Indonesia and local languages). Therefore the deletion of English subject in the elementary schools can be said as a setback because the children will have difficulty when they start learning English in SMP level.

English is very important means of communication in global world. Being able to speak English, we can interact directly with the international people. By providing English lesson in elementary school, the Indonesian people will have better understanding on English because they will have longer time to study this language. As a result, they can make use of English to know the global world better. The benefit of learning English may not be so noticeable when the children are still in elementary

school, but it would be extremely helpful for the children's future, and to proceed to the next level of education.

The era of globalization, better known as 'free market', requires each individual to prepare him/herself in the field of science and technology. However to know and understand them, they have to read many books and communicate with international people. By understanding English, people will be able to log in and access the world of information and technology. Students will have a great chance to master nowadays gadgets and technologies when they have good English. Most of recent technologies like computer, mobile phones, etc use English. It is because the producers understand that English is the international language, and using English will be very advantageous to make their product known by the consumers.

Finally in line with the main purpose of basic education in Indonesia that is to prepare early students' basic knowledge before going on to higher level of education, English subject in elementary schools is a must. By possessing basic English, it is expected that the students will have no difficulty learning this language when they reach the next level of education.

### **E. The integration of nationalism values into English language teaching**

"The most important aspect of postmethod pedagogy is its particularity" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). It means that the pedagogy "must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). The idea of particularity is very important here. As described above, the main problem is the concern of some parties that teaching English will only reduce the students' sense

of nationalism. If that is our main concern, we have to set a particular goal of teaching English in elementary school that is growing the students' nationalism through teaching English.

The question is then how to that? As illustrated earlier that there is no scientific evidence that teaching English will reduce the students' sense of nationalism, I propose two ways that can be applied by the teachers in English classes. Through the ways I propose, it is expected that not only English will the students improve but also their sense of nationalism. The two ways are the internalization of nationalism values and using songs of nationalism.

#### **a. Internalization of values**

One possible solution is internalizing the values of nationalism into English language teaching materials. Internalization is defined as unification of attitudes, standards of behavior, opinions, etc into personality (Chaplin, 2005). Internalization, in such sense, can also be translated into the collection of value or collecting certain attitude that is formed into intact personality. By replacing previous texts with the texts related to nationalism, it is expected that the students' sense of nationalism will improve. The main purpose of this kind of internalization is that the students will not only learn basic English vocabulary but also the English vocabulary about Indonesia. Therefore, one day, the students can promote Indonesia internationally using English.

The steps that can be taken to internalize the values of nationalism into English teaching material are:

- 1) Identifying the values of nationalism that can be incorporated into teaching materials. Some examples of the values of nationalism are:

- developing one's love to the homeland and the nation
  - developing one's sense of national pride of Indonesia
  - building one's sense of brotherhood, solidarity, peace, and nonviolence among groups in society with the spirit of unity
  - maintaining and protecting the country from all forms of threats, both from within and outside the country
  - complying with and obeying the rules of State
  - having initiative to make changes for the betterment of the nation and the State
  - obeying and understanding the values contained in the 1945 Constitution and Pancasila
  - And others
- 2) After determining what nationalism values that should be included in the teaching materials, the next step is finding teaching materials written in English (basic level) related to Indonesian nationalism. In this case we can make use of online sources. There are many online resources that can be used by teachers. Here are some Internet sources containing Indonesian nationalism values that should be considered as part of the teaching material.
- a) <http://www.indonezia.ro/republic.htm>  
 In this site, we can find a lot of passages in English about the history of Indonesia, Proclamation of independence, Pancasila, the national flag, state emblem, and national anthem. In this site we can also read some information about Indonesian art and culture such as gamelan, Batik, Wayang, Balinese dance etc. There is also information about The Land, The People, Geography, Climate and Weather, Territorial Waters and Exclusive Economic Zone, Volcanoes, Rivers and Lakes, Fauna, Flora, Indonesia Standard Time, Population, The Nationality Act, Languages and Dialects.
- b) <http://www.asian-recipe.com/indonesia/id-information/traditional-indonesian-music.html>  
 This site provides interesting information about the traditional musics of Indonesia such as angklung, gamelan, and others. All are written in English
- c) <http://www.asian-recipe.com/indonesia>  
 This site provides interesting information about Indonesian traditional dishes such as fried chicken, satay, and others. All are written in English.
- d) <http://www.expats.or.id/info/games.html>  
 This site provides interesting information about Indonesian traditional games such as marbles, tops, and others. All are written in English.
- e) <http://www.kidcyber.com.au/indonesia-clothing/>  
 This site provides interesting information about the existing religious clothing in Indonesia. All are written in English.
- 3) After selecting the passages, the next step is creating a kind of *graded reader* by simplifying the texts in accordance with the students' English proficiency level (in this case beginner level). It is better that the passage construction refers to graded reader level 1. The type of the sentences and the choice of the vocabulary must be very simple.  
 For example:



The original text taken from the internet (<http://www.indonesia.ro/republic.htm>) is:

*The Indonesian coat of arms consists of a golden eagle, called "GARUDA," that is a figure from ancient Indonesian epics. It is also pictured on many temples from the 6th Century. The eagle is a symbol of creative energy. Its principal color, gold, suggests the greatness of the nation. The black color represents nature. There are 17 feathers on each wing, 8 on the tail and 45 on the neck. These figures stand for the date of Indonesia's independence proclamation: 17 August, 1945.*

The text can be simplified like the following:

*Garuda is the coat of arms of Indonesia. Garuda is the name of a bird. The dominant color of the bird is gold. Gold means the greatness of nation. Each wing has 17 feathers. The tail has 8 feathers, and the neck has 45 feathers. The numbers shows the date of Indonesia's independence: 17 August 1945.*

#### b. Using songs of nationalism

The second way that can be done is using the "nationalism" songs when teaching English. Children of all ages love to sing, play and repeat short songs. A wise foreign language teacher in elementary schools can utilize this natural tendency for teaching in class. Songs and classical chants can be utilized to create a pleasant atmosphere, resulting in the interest and enthusiasm of the students to learn.

English teachers should be able to teach English language in proper way and of

course joyfully. Teachers should ensure the students that English is not a difficult subject to learn. Teachers must be able to create an environment that makes English fun to learn. By learning English in a fun environment, students will understand that English is easy to learn.

Elementary school children are still innocent and therefore teachers must be careful in teaching English to them. Children will take for granted whatever given by the teachers. Once the teacher teaches English wrongly, they will bring the wrong English until the next level of education. Children will be more likely to retain what has been obtained from his teacher at the elementary school, even though it is not right.

Songs can be very useful to be used as a medium of learning vocabulary and as a medium for correcting students' pronunciation without causing a shame on the part of the students. Bumpass (1963, 132) states that there are two factors that determine the success of using songs in teaching a foreign language to young students. They are:

- a. Selection of intellectually interesting songs that can address the emotional needs of the students.
- b. Selection of fun learning activities that are able to maintain interest, be used as a tool for learning new sounds, help learning new words and concepts through suitable action and dramatization.

Based on the Bumpass' argument above, the songs of nationalism with English lyrics will be very useful to awaken the students' spirit of Indonesian nationalism. One of the examples of nationalism songs that we can use to teach English is the song entitled Hari Merdeka which has been translated into English

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PB9T4lI0R-g>). The lyric is as follows:

*August 17, 1945  
That is the day of our independence day  
Independence day  
Homeland and Nation  
It is the birth of Indonesia  
Freedom !!!  
Once we are free  
We'll keep being free  
As long as our souls remains in our bodies  
We will stay loyal!  
Stay loyal!  
To defend our Indonesia  
We will stay loyal!  
Stay loyal!  
To speak up for our country.*

In addition to the songs of Indonesian struggle for independence, we can also use children songs that are native to Indonesia. However, the songs have been written in English, for example “Cicak Cicak Di Dinding” (Gecko Gecko on The Wall) as can be seen on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xjA17aUQ7A>. The lyric is as follows:

*Gecko-gecko on the wall  
Quietly- quietly crawls along  
Now here comes a mosquito  
Chomp!  
I've been caught oh no!*

*Gecko-gecko on the floor  
Quietly crawls out the door  
Now here comes a mosquito  
Chomp!  
I've been caught oh no!*

*Gecko-gecko in a car  
Going somewhere very far  
Now here comes a mosquito  
Chomp!  
I've been caught oh no!*

Other similar songs can be seen in the following sites:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqQLE MkMf8Q> (Climb to the Mountaintop)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Chk8 MSCSMU> (Cockatoo Song)

## F. Conclusion

As illustrated above it can be concluded that learning English is very important to be done since early ages (more specifically since elementary school) to get better result. It can be inferred as well that there is no scientific evidence that prove learning English in early age can only reduce the students' sense of nationalism. Indonesian people have been for long time dealing with foreign languages such as Arabic, Dutch, and Japanese. But the nationalism of Indonesian people in general remains high. In short, there is no need to remove this subject from the curriculum.

Teaching English is actually can be used to raise the sense of nationalism. At least there are two ways that can be applied: internalization of nationalism values into the teaching materials and using songs of nationalism. Through these techniques it is expected that not only the children's English but also their sense of nationalism will increase.

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