

The Case of East Timor Education beyond Independence 2000-2008

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ABSTRACT

The strong motive of East Timor government to establish a national identity through education had brought serious issues. This writing primarily discusses about the drawbacks regarding to East Timor language policy in education sector during the period of 2000 – 2008. Spolsky's framework was employed to analyze the sociolinguistics situation, working of national/ethnic/other identity within the community, minority language rights and English role as a global language. The study was done by thorough library research in the related fields. The results show that while community language practice was ignored, the top-down language policy put more emphasis on Portuguese as the national identity language, Tetun Dili and English as the global language. As a result, the teachers and students were disadvantaged due to the inability to speak Portuguese, Tetun Dili and English. Second, the strong socio-historical context and political affinity to Portugal and its language had given little role to local languages in Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education.

1. Introduction

East Timor was colonized by Portuguese from 1500s to 1975 and part of Indonesia from 1975 to 1999 (Leach 2006, p. 223-224). Since the occupation of Portuguese and Indonesia in East Timor, education was one of the sectors where Portuguese and Indonesian can be imposed to the society. Hajek argues that Portuguese was imposed to the East Timorese by the provision of mass education. In addition, soon after a full integration to Indonesia in 1975, Indonesian dominated education. Other languages such as Portuguese and Chinese were phased out from this sector but other local languages were ignored (2000, p.403-405).

This case study will review language policy in East Timor education using Spolsky's framework: language practices, language belief/ideology, and language intervention/planning and management. These three frameworks will be analysed in detail under four components, namely: sociolinguistics situation, working of national/ethnic/other identity within the community, minority language rights and the role of English as a global language. Furthermore, this case study will also analyse whether the language policy in East Timor education has been successful or not. In accounting for the success or failure, this writing will provide more explanation on the factor contributing the failure or success. This writing also provides explanation on the greatest challenge of language policy faced by this polity and comment on the usefulness of Spolsky's framework of analyzing this country education. This paper argues that although the language management in East Timor education has accommodated minority language rights, the strong socio-historical context and political affinity towards Portuguese still dominates the language management.

2. Discussion

2.1 Sociolinguistics situation

In looking at the language policy of East Timor education, it is important to start off with the sociolinguistics situation of this state. As a newly developing country with 1, 348, 000 people, East Timor is a highly multilingual country (Ethnologue, 2020). While Portuguese and Tetun Dili are the official languages, English and Bahasa Indonesia are assigned to be the working languages (Boon 2011, p. 261). According to Ethnologue, Portuguese has 600 speakers, Tetun Dili has 385, 000 speakers,

English has 808 speakers and Bahasa Indonesia has 2411 speakers (Ethnologue 2013). Fox (2003, p.42) explains that Tetun Dili is one of Tetun varieties spoken in the capital of Dili which becomes urban area in the 18th century.

Besides the official and working languages, this polity also has 21 local languages and 1 language which is already extinct. The name, speaker number and areas of the local languages are elaborated in the following table.

Table 1 Local languages of East Timor (Ethnologue 2020)

No	Name of local language	Number of speakers	Area spoken
1	Tetun Dili	385,000	L1 in Dili district: East Timor north coast; L2 scattered in western part of East Timor.
2	Atauran	5,000	Dili district: Atauro island; Timor island north of capital.
3	Baikeno	72,000	Oecusse municipality: enclave separated from the rest of East Timor.
4	Bunak	76,000	Ainaro district: Zumalai subdistrict; Bobonaro district: Maliana south; Cova Lima district: on Timor island central interior, south coast, north of Suai town.
5	Fataluku	37,000	Lautém district: Los Palos area on Timor island east tip.
6	Galolen	13,680	Aileu district: small border area southeast; Dili district: 2 enclaves on Atauro island, and Metinaro area; Manatuto district: coast inland to Laclubar area.
7	Habun	2,700	Manatuto district: Laclubar subdistrict.
8	Idaté	13,500	Aileu district: southeast; Manatuto district: Laclubar mountains; Manufahi district: north.
9	Kairui - Midiki	15,000	Manatuto district: west central small mountainous area; Viqueque district: Lacluta area.
10	Kemak	72,000	Bobonaro municipality: Bobonaro town north to Lois river; Cova Lima municipality; Ermera municipality: Atsabe subdistrict.
11	Makalero	6,500	Lautém district: Ilimoar area on Timor island.
12	Makasae	102,000	Baucau district: north coast and inland; Lautém district: west band; Manatuto district: on Timor island; Viqueque district: north half; generally, from north to south coast in a dialect chain.
13	Mambae	131,000	Aileu, Ainaro, and Ermera districts: central Timor mountains; Bobonaro, Dili, and Liquiçá districts: north coast; Cova Lima district: south coast; Manufahi district: Same subdistrict.
14	Nauete	15,000	Baucau district: southeast; Lautém district: southwest; Viqueque district: west; all on Timor island south coast; Uato Lari is main town.
15	Tukudede	39,500	Bobonaro, Ermera, and Liquiçá districts: Lois river to west of Ponta Acoilo, near Dili on Timor island north coast.
16	Lakalei	3,250	Ainaro district: northeast; Manufahi district: north of Same; small border enclaves, Aileu and Manatuto districts.
17	Waima'a	18,400	Baucau district: Baucau and Vemasse subdistricts on Timor island northeast coast.
18	Makuva	56	Lautém district: Los Palos area on Timor island east tip.
19	Pidgin Timor	0 (Extinct)	-
20	Welaun	7,080	Bobonaro district: Balibo Vila, Leohito.

21	Portuguese	600	Widespread in East Timor
22	Tetun	400,000	East Nusa Tenggara province: central Timor island.

2.2 Language management and language practice of medium of instruction (Mol)

Spolsky (2009, p.4) defines language management as the explicit effort made by authorized individual or group over the participants within the domains. Wiley (1996) identified that language management encompasses two interrelated activities: status and corpus planning (in Kamwangamalu 1997 p, 235). Furthermore, Cooper (1989, p.33) proposed the third activity called acquisition planning. The use of language as a medium of instruction in East Timor falls on the category of acquisition planning and forced by the working of national language, minority language rights in education and the spread of English as global language. On the other hand, language practice designates to the selection of linguistics features by an individual speaker whether consciously or unconsciously which makes up the conventional unmarked pattern of a variety of a language (Spolsky 2004, p.9).

2.2.1 The working of national/ethnic/other identity through language in education

In the period of 1999-2008, the grounding motive of language management of East Timor education was national identity building. Although the number of Tetun and Indonesian speakers is higher than Portuguese speakers, both languages were not given as many rooms as Portuguese in 1998-2008 Mol management. The priority of using Portuguese as the main Mol was driven by the desire to forge a national identity which distinguished East Timor from Indonesia and consolidated the ties to Portugal. The affinity to Portugal is related to decolonialisation, self-determination and liberation struggle which become the part of East Timor identity and cultural heritage (Taylor Leech 2013, Hull 1999). Due to the strong affinity to Portugal, the language management in 2002 introduced Portuguese as a medium of instruction and a subject. This ex-colonial language was used as a language of instruction from grade 1 to 6 and being taught as a subject for four hours a week (Taylor-Leech 2013, p. 7).

However, the practice shows that most of the teachers and students in the schools do not speak Portuguese (Earnest 2003, p. 4). Hill and Saldanha (2001, p. 29) argue that only five percent of the population can speak Portuguese at the implementation 2002 language management. In addition, Nicolai says that while 80 % of the population speaks Tetun as an oral communication aid, only 43 % are fluent in Indonesian and most of the teachers and students prefer to continue the use of Indonesian in education (2004, p.23). By the reason of the incapability of communicating in Portuguese, the teacher was unable to deliver the knowledge to the students using Portuguese.

In addition, even though Indonesian was phased out from East Timor education, Indonesian textbooks and curriculum were still used as the teaching and learning resources at this time due the lack of teaching resources (Taylor-Leech 2013, p.7). Some aspects of Indonesian textbooks and curriculum, such as, Indonesian ideology (*Panca Sila*), and history, were abandoned (Leach 2006, p. 227).

The policy of Mol in this state was then modified in 2004 to 2007 by giving a peripheral role to Tetun Dili. The teachers were allowed to use Tetun Dili as "an oral pedagogic aide" in several subjects, such as environmental studies, social sciences, history, and geography (Ministry of Education, culture, Youth, and Sports 2004a, p. 9). The modification of policy also emphasized the reinforcement of teaching the co-official languages, Tetun Dili and Portuguese in early and later grade (Ministry of Education, culture, Youth, and Sports 2004a, p. 9). Tetun Dili was given five hours a week in grade 1 and 2 and two hours a week in grade 6. On the other hand, Portuguese was allotted for three hours a week in grade 1 and 2 but six hours a week in grade 6 (Ministry of Education, culture, Youth, and Sports 2004a, p. 9). Again, in this period, Portuguese was still given more room to play pivotal role in constructing the identity of East Timor.

The emphasis on East Timor nation building through Portuguese in 2004-2007 does not still show any relevancy to the teacher and students' language practice. Quinn (2010, p. 235) explains that the teachers were unable to use Portuguese to understand and explain the content. It is evident from the study conducted by Quinn that the teachers made grammatical and lexical errors as well as mistake in understanding the content due to the lack of confidence, experience and proficiency in Portuguese (2010, p.235-236). The emphasis of Portuguese as the Mol also impacted the students. The lack of Portuguese proficiency limited the students to deliver their ideas. They can only provide short answer containing one word and repeated the word during the discussion with teacher (Quinn 2010, p.238).

In addition to previous Mol language management, the education policy framework 2004-2008 was reformed in 2006-2007 (Taylor-Leech 2013, p.8). The policy gave a new role to Tetun Dili as a supporting language. By doing so, it means that Portuguese was still emphasized as the main instructional language while Tetun Dili played a role as a supporting language for oral explanation. Tetun Dili was 70 % used in Grade 1, 50 % in Grade 2, 30 % in grade 3. On the other hand, Portuguese was

30 % used in Grade 1, 50 % used in grade 2, 70 % used in grade 3 and fully used in grade 4 onwards (Taylor-Leech 2013, p.8-9). In 2008, Tetun Dili no longer served as a supporting language of instruction. It is due to the fact that the education system was reformed again in this year without any obvious reason. The reformation focused on the acknowledgment of equal function of Tetun Dili as main language of instruction beside Portuguese (Taylor-Leech 2013, p.9).

Though Tetun Dili was given a role as a supporting language and later an equal function as Portuguese, the language practice in the rural areas were still disadvantaged by the acknowledgement of Tetun Dili as the medium of instruction. It is due to the fact that most people in the rural areas speak their local languages rather than Portuguese or Tetun Dili (Macpherson 2011, p.187). The disadvantages are students cannot understand what is taught in the class. Besides the inability to understand the content, students cannot express their self verbally so it is difficult for the teachers to diagnose what has been grasped by the students, what needs to be taught and which students need further assistance (Benson 2005, p. 3).

2.2.2 Minority language rights

The evolution of language management of medium of instruction from 2000-2008 clearly shows that the language right of minority students and teacher was ignored. The freedom to use and study in language they know was restricted (Riagain and Shuibhne 1997, p.17). The ignorance and restriction on minority languages to be used as the language of instruction draw UN and other donor agencies to take an initiative in conducting two conferences which can bring new reformation to the language in education. By the assistance of UNICEF, UNESCO and Care International, East Timor Ministry of Education was able to carry out a conference. The conference, which was held in April 2008, discussed the evaluation of current language management in education, promotion of mother tongue education, and the role of teacher in deciding the language of instruction. This conference included other international agencies, minority language speakers, local and foreign academics, and teachers (Taylor-Leech 2011, p 297).

Another conference was held by the ministry of culture in collaboration with Timor Lorosa'e Nippon Culture Centre, the Instituto Nacional de Linguística (National Institute of Linguistics) and UNESCO. This conference also involved 100 delegates who represented almost all local languages. The main agenda of this conference was urging the government to give serious attention to the role and right of other local languages in the education system (Taylor-Leech 2011, p 298).

Both conferences brought positive response from the government which was marked by the launch of a mother tongue education called Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in 21 February 2011. This education policy recommends the use of a student's first language as the initial language of instruction in education. While Portuguese and Tetun Dili was slowly introduced in grade 3, English and Bahasa Indonesia was later commenced in grade 7. MTB-MLE policy also allowed temporary teaching assistants to help the teachers who do not speak the local languages (Taylor-Leech 2011, p.299-300).

2.2.3 The spread of English in East Timor education

The inclusion of English in MTB-MLE is also conditioned by the spread of English as global language. The arrival of UN peace keeping, civilian police and other international donor agencies in East Timor since 1999 brought English to the multilingual scene of East Timor. Since the arrival, English becomes the working language among these agencies, East Timor government and the community.

The existence of English in this state results in the increase of English speakers due to the contact with other international agencies. Besides the political affairs, many young speakers show positive responses to the existence of English due to its benefit (Savage 2012, p.3). For example, East Timorese who are proficient in English are highly paid as the counterpart to help other international agencies (Taylor-Leech 2013, p.4). The role and benefit of English as global languages force this polity to include English as one of the languages taught in the education.

2.3 Language Ideology/Belief towards MTB-MLE

Although the policy of MTB-MLE brings positive impacts including accommodating minority language rights to learn in their first or native languages, there is a growing awareness on the language ideology or belief towards the implementation of MTB-MLE. The first belief is the implementation of MTB-MLE is claimed to undermine the learning of official languages by East Timorese (Taylor-Leech 2012, p. 89). The belief then constructs a misleading perception that the earlier the official language is introduced in the curriculum, the better the students can acquire the language. However, Rivera argues that adult learners learn better than children in the earlier stage of phonological acquisition (cited in Marinova-Todd, Marshall and Snow 2000, p. 12). Genesee supports Rivera's argument by stating that older learners are more efficient learners than younger ones (cited in Marinova-Todd, Marshall and Snow 2000, p. 12). Interestingly, Krashen, Long and Scarcella who firstly argued that younger learners achieve greater proficiency had to admit that adult learners acquire a language more rapidly

(cited in Marinova-Todd, Marshall and Snow 2000, p. 12). The second language belief is the community perception towards their local languages. Their local languages are considered inferior and give less job opportunity than other languages, such as English. Thus, some community still refuses the implementation of MTB-MLE.

2.4 Remarks on the language policy of East Timor Education

Given a very complex situation of language policy in East Timor education, it is pivotal to evaluate whether this country has succeeded or failed in the language policy. Language policy in East Timor in the period of 2000-2008 can be argued to be far from success. The reason is top-down language policy still ignored the language practice within community. The policy makers prefer to prioritize on Portuguese to construct national identity rather than the language used by the students at home. As a result, students could not understand the content, 70 % of students were dropped out in primary schools, students achievements remained low because education was based on memorization, parents were hesitated to send their children to school because of Portuguese was being used as the Mol, and teachers were under pressure because of the demand use of Portuguese as the Mol (Hajek 2000, Taylor-Leech 2013, Benson 2005). However, the language policy from 2008 to recent time which is MTB-MLE policy is not accomplished yet. This policy can be projected to be succeed in the future if effectively implemented and supported by the community, other agencies and government (Taylor-Leech & Caet 2008).

Despite the failure of the language policy in this country, the greatest challenge on language policy resides on language management. There are two reasons why language management is the greatest challenge. The first one is the strong affinity to Portugal still dominates the language management of East Timor whether in 2000-2008 or in 2008- present. The second reason is government and policy makers still give little role to local languages in MTB-MLE. Taylor-Leech (2011, p.300) notices that the government still emphasizes that all curriculum and teaching materials for MTB-MLE are written in Tetun Dili and Portuguese. Even though a student's first language has been acknowledged as the initial language of instruction in MTB-MLE, the assessment is still based on Portuguese (Taylor-Leech 2011, p.302)

Language policy and planning is rich in framework to examine the instrument of policy development. Spolsky framework is one of the frameworks which contributes profound and helpful scheme to account for challenges faced by the policy makers and education planners in East Timor. By employing this framework, the challenges can be seen from the angle of actors who play a role in the decision making, implementing the policy and supporting the sustainability and ultimate success of the policy. The other challenge can be seen from what attempt has been done in the language policy to influence the language behavior of the polity and for what ends the policy has been made. In addition, this framework also helps to reveal the conditions that affect the policy making, by what means, through what decision-making process, and the effects of the policy.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, as the ex-colonial country of Portuguese and part of Indonesia, this country deals with many socio-historical and political contacts from both countries. As a result, the earlier decision making in language policy for education after the independence 2002-2008 was still grounded in the motive of maintaining a national identity which marks the liberation struggle. The motives unfortunately disadvantaged and put more pressure to the teachers and students who do not speak Portuguese and Tetun. In spite of the nation building motives, this polity has shifted to a new language policy which prioritizes minority language right and the benefit of English as the global language since 2008 to recent time.

The language policy in the period of 2000-2008 can be argued to be far from success. The reason resides on the top-down language policy which ignored the language practice within community because of prioritizing Portuguese as the language of national identity. However, the language policy from 2008 to recent time which is MTB-MLE policy is not accomplished yet. Thus, this policy cannot be concluded to undergo a success or a failure. Despite the failure of the language policy in this country, the greatest challenge on language policy resides on language management because of strong affinity to Portugal and little role is given to local languages in MTB-MLE

The last important remark on this case study is Spolsky framework is very helpful to account for challenges faced by the policy makers and education planners in East Timor. This framework helps to analyze of actor of the policy, attempt of the policy, purpose, conditions, effects, means and process of the policy. The case study concludes that although the language management in East Timor education has accommodated minority language rights, the strong socio-historical context and political affinity towards Portuguese still dominates the language management. The issues and challenges of language policy in education in this country is still a lot to be investigated. It is highly recommended that the researcher can conduct more research about the implementation of MTB-MLE and the language policy beyond 2008 in this country. It is due to the fact the growing number of Portuguese and Tetun speakers may describe different linguistics situations that affects the education system.

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