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# Towards Teachers' Communicative Competence Enhancement: A Study on School Preparation for Bilingual Programs

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**Abstract:** This research is a preliminary study of an empirical research aimed to develop an English training model to enhance teachers' communicative competence in bilingual schools. This preliminary study aims to give a description of the schools' background and preparation to run bilingual programs, teachers' background and experience in teaching using English, and the challenges related to communicative competence which are faced by teachers inside and outside the classrooms. This study was a qualitative study and the data were collected using semi-structured interview, open-ended questionnaire, and focus group discussion. This study involved 54 teachers and 5 school principals. The results of the study revealed that the schools under this study were under the category of additive bilingual education; the teachers in the bilingual programs were English and non-English Department graduates; and the challenges faced by the teachers were mostly related with their teaching experience and educational background. The findings of this study will be useful to recommend teacher trainings as a part of teachers' professional development.

**Key words:** teachers, communicative competence, bilingual program

*Abstrak:* Penelitian ini merupakan bagian awal dari sebuah rangkaian penelitian empirik yang bertujuan untuk mengembangkan sebuah model pelatihan Bahasa Inggris untuk meningkatkan

*kemampuan komunikatif guru-guru sekolah dwibahasa. Penelitian awal ini bertujuan memberikan gambaran tentang latar belakang sekolah dan persiapan sekolah untuk membuka program dwibahasa; latar belakang dan pengalaman guru dalam mengajar dengan bahasa Inggris; serta tantangan berkaitan dengan kemampuan berkomunikasi yang dihadapi para guru baik di dalam maupun di luar kelas. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dan data dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan teknik wawancara semi terstruktur, kuisisioner terbuka, dan focus group discussion. 54 guru dan 5 orang kepala sekolah terlibat dalam penelitian ini. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sekolah-sekolah subyek masuk kategori additive bilingual education; guru-guru di sekolah dwibahasa adalah lulusan program Bahasa Inggris dan jurusan lain; tantangan yang dihadapi para guru terutama terkait dengan pengalaman mengajar dan latar belakang pendidikan mereka. Hasil penelitian ini akan bermanfaat untuk memberi rekomendasi pelatihan guru sebagai bagian dari pengembangan profesionalisme guru.*

**Kata kunci:** *guru, kemampuan komunikatif, sekolah dwibahasa*

## INTRODUCTION

The increased number of bilingual schools especially in big cities in Indonesia has raised a question of the readiness of the schools to give their best educational services through the facilities, curriculum, teaching materials, and the human resources (Hartono, 2016). Teachers as the main human resources of educational institution play an important role as both language model provider and the source of knowledge. Therefore, teachers in bilingual schools have double burdens; they have to provide good language model for the students and at the same time, they have to transfer the knowledge to the students. On the other hand, parents who send their children to bilingual schools also have high expectations toward their children's success as bilinguals. Again, in this point, teachers are also expected to help those children grow as bilinguals. To meet the parents' expectations, schools and teachers should give their best educational services. Hence, a concern needs to be given to the quality and the quality maintenance of the teachers as the main human resource.

Since most bilingual schools in Indonesia use English as one of the instructional languages, teachers at bilingual schools are supposed to be competent in English language. Specifically, in order to be able to deliver

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different subjects in English, teachers should be communicatively competent. In other words, teachers' communicative competence to enhance classroom discourse should be given attention. Communicative competence itself is defined as the ability to use language appropriately according to the setting, social relationships, and communicative purposes (Celce-Murcia, 2007). Nevertheless, in reality, not all teachers are capable of doing so because not all teachers involved in bilingual program have good capabilities in both target language and the field of the knowledge.

This research was a preliminary study of an empirical research aimed to develop an English training model to enhance teachers' communicative competence in bilingual programs at primary schools. This preliminary study aimed to give a description of the schools' background and preparation to run bilingual programs, teachers' background and experience in teaching using English, and the challenges related to communicative competence which were faced by teachers inside and outside the classrooms. The results of this study will be useful to recommend teacher trainings as a part of teachers' professional development.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Bilingual Education

According to Anderson, Boyer, & Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (PPRC, 2010), the use of instruction in two languages as medium of instruction for any part, or all, of the school curriculum can be identified as the main feature of bilingual education. Schools which only teach the target language as a "subject" are not included as bilingual program (Cummins & Hornberger, 2008). Meanwhile, Stephen May (2008) puts bilingual education into two kinds of programs which are recognized as subtractive and additive programs:

A program is considered subtractive if it promotes monolingual learning in the dominant language, either losing or replacing one language with another. A program can be considered additive if it promotes bilingualism and biliteracy over the long term, usually by adding another language to the student's existing repertoire.

In bilingual education, students are taught in two languages of instruction. In Indonesia, commonly the language of instructions used are Indonesian and one other target language. Most of the educational institutions which run bilingual program include English as one of the instructional languages. Therefore, the teachers of bilingual programs are supposed to master both of the languages of instruction. Burn and Richard (2009) describe the possible conditions of teachers who teach at bilingual schools in this following figure:

**Figure 1:**  
**Continua of Target Language Proficiency and Professional Preparation**

		Proficient in the target language	
Professionally prepared as a language teacher	1	3	Not professionally prepared as a language teacher
	2	4	
		Not proficient in the target language (Burn and Richard, 2009)	

There are four groups of teachers:

- a. Teachers who are professionally prepared as language teacher and proficient in the target language
- b. Teachers who are professionally prepared as language teacher but not proficient in the target language
- c. Teachers who are not professionally prepared as language teacher but proficient in the target language
- d. Teachers who are not professionally prepared as language teacher and not proficient in the target language

## **B. Communicative Competence**

Competency is a highly valued qualification that accounts for the effective use of one's knowledge and skills in a specific, usually complex context (Westera, 2001, p.79). The competence can be observed from the performance. Therefore, if someone is labelled as a competent person, his

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performances are supposed to come up to a standard (Barnett, 1994 in  
Westera, 2001).

One of the competencies demanded in every professional field is  
communication competency. Considering the fact that communication is a  
complex process which involves some aspects, communication itself can be  
seen as some dimensions as the following:

- a. Communication as information exchange,
- b. Communication as mental-state reading and influencing,
- c. Communication as interaction,
- d. Communication as situation management

For teachers of bilingual schools, the ability of handling a discourse in  
English is very important. This ability includes all the dimensions of  
communication competencies above. In fact, it is the core of communicative  
competence model as suggested by Celce Murcia, Dornyei and Thurrel  
(1995). In 2007, Celce-Murcia revised her 1995 model and proposed  
communicative competence model for language teachers. The  
communicative competence consists of:

- a. Sociocultural competence which refers to the speaker's pragmatic  
knowledge that is how to express messages appropriately within the  
overall social and cultural context of communication (Celce-Murcia,  
2007).
- b. Discourse competence that refers to the selection, sequencing, and  
arrangement of words, structures, and utterances to achieve a unified  
spoken message. There are four areas within this competence :
  - i. Cohesion which includes the use of conventions to use reference  
(anaphora/cahaphore), substitution/ellipsis, conjunction and  
lexical chains (Halliday and Hasan, 1976 in Celce-Murcia, 2007)
  - ii. Deixis which is the use of pronouns, spatial terms, temporal  
terms, and textual reference. The ability to use deixis supports  
teachers' professional role both in and outside the classroom.

- iii. Coherence refers to the ability to manage old and new information through the conventions recognized and used by the target language users.
  - iv. Generic structure is the ability to identify oral discourse segment such as narrative, conversation, lecture, report, etc.
- c. Linguistic competence which includes the knowledge in phonology, lexicon, morphology, and syntax. In short, this is the competence that enables target language users to use the language correctly according to the rules of the language.
- d. Formulaic competence
- Celce-Murcia (2007, p. 47) refers this competence to “those fixed and pre-fabricated chunks of language that speakers use heavily in everyday interaction”. A speaker of a language can be called as fluent speaker when he or she has and uses formulaic knowledge as much as he or she has systematic linguistic knowledge.
- e. Interactional competence covers three components :
- i. Actional competence that is the competence to perform action through speech acts. Target language users with actional competence can perform interactions and express opinions and feelings in the target language
  - ii. Conversational competence which is the ability to handle conversation including how to open, close, interrupt, and backchannel
  - iii. Non-verbal/paralinguistic competence which includes the use of non-verbal language to support an interaction in the target language.
- f. Strategic Competence which refers to the ability to sustain smoothly in a communication.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was a qualitative study which aimed to find out:

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- a. how the schools prepared the bilingual program
- b. the teachers' educational background and experience in teaching using English
- c. the problems faced by teachers in their role as teachers of bilingual schools inside and outside the classroom

The data were collected using semi-structured interview, open-ended questionnaire, and focus group discussion. Creswell (2008, pp.178-192) mentions that qualitative interviews can be conducted through face to face interviews or telephone with participants or through a focus group discussion. The interviews involved a few number of questions which aimed to elicit views and opinions from the participants. The questionnaire used in this study was open-ended questionnaire to confirm the data gotten from the interviews. Meanwhile, the respondents of this research were teachers and school principals who were purposively selected from five private bilingual schools in Semarang, Central Java Province, Indonesia. There were 54 teachers and 5 school principals involved in this study.

The qualitative reliability of this study was accomplished by documenting every step of data collecting and detail of respondents and setting. Triangulation was done to support the validity of the study. It was conducted by interviewing different sources using several kinds of instruments such as face-to-face interviews, open-ended questionnaire, and focus group discussion with the participants.

## **RESULTS**

### **A. How the schools prepared the bilingual program**

All the schools under this study were additive bilingual education. It can be seen from how the schools prepared the bilingual programs. From the results of interviews with school principals and senior teachers at the bilingual schools, it was found out that the main purpose of the bilingual program was to prepare students to be bilingual with English as the target language. Four of the schools opened the bilingual program as companion to regular program and two of them preferred to use special names for the program. They were called as "immersion program" and English Program".



Meanwhile, in one of the schools, the bilingual program was applied to all students from the first to the last grade.

Seen from how the schools prepared the bilingual programs, there were some schools which prepared the bilingual program as companion to the regular program. What made it different from regular program was that English taught as “subject” in regular program while in bilingual program English was used as the language of instruction in most of the curriculum. Basically, the launching of bilingual program had more to do with the schools’ effort to get more students. The use of English as the language of instruction was a great attraction for parents to send their children to this program.

Among five schools under this study, one of them was prepared as bilingual school since its establishment. This school did not have regular program and it used English as the main language of instruction. Indonesian language was used only in Indonesian language class and in the preparation class for the national exam. Despite the use of mixed language (English and Indonesian) in lower grades, in almost all subjects, English was used in the interaction among teacher and students inside and outside the classroom.

### **B. Teachers’ educational background and experience in teaching using English**

The results of the questionnaire revealed that 50% of the respondents taught at the bilingual program because they were assigned by the schools to teach in the program. The other half of the respondents taught at the bilingual program because of their own will. 59,3% of the respondents were English department graduates and 40,7% were non-English department graduates. The teachers were selected to teach at the bilingual program through a selection process which started from the recruitment of the teachers. The process of recruitment were for totally new teachers or teachers from regular program who were assigned to teach at the bilingual program and those who with their own initiative applied for the position.

Teachers who were involved in the preparation of the program as steering committee were those who graduated from Faculty of Language or English teacher education. They particularly had previous experiences as English teacher at regular programs whereas new teachers may come from English department or non-English department. For the new teachers, they had to undergo a series of recruitment process such as having micro teaching, interview in English and doing English proficiency test (TOEFL

test). Some of the new teachers had got previous experiences in teaching using English in national plus schools, international schools or other similar bilingual schools. Meanwhile, there were also schools who assigned their non-English subject teachers to teach in English because the schools offered bilingual classes for the students. This group of teachers did not have any experience in teaching using English.

From the result of the interviews and focus group discussion, the teachers admitted that they hardly received any training related to their English competences for teaching. If they got trainings, most of the trainings were more about teaching techniques and how to use certain books in the class. The trainings were usually given by book publishers. Some schools held short training on how to teach in English before or even after they launched the bilingual program. The short training was to give teachers basic skills to teach in English including how to open the class, how to deliver lessons, and how to close the class.

### **C. The challenges faced by teachers of bilingual programs inside and outside the classrooms**

Referring to the continua of target language proficiency and professional preparation (Burn and Richard, 2009) outlined in the previous section, the four groups described in figure 1 above were also found among the teachers in this study. In fact, each group of teacher had its own problems. There were teachers who were professionally prepared as language teachers. This group of teachers graduated from English department or from English education institutes. In general, these teachers did not have problems with the use of English in their daily interaction with students. The common problems faced by these teachers were their unfamiliarity with some terms in non-language subjects. As teachers of bilingual schools, they had to teach all subjects in English. Sometimes they found it hard to explain new concepts in science or math because they were not prepared to teach science or math. To solve this problem, the teachers prepared themselves before class by learning the materials or consulting with their colleagues who taught those subjects in native language or in Indonesian.

Although there were only some, but there were some teachers who were professionally prepared as language teachers but did not have good proficiency in English. Commonly, these teachers did not have problems in delivering their lessons in English but the problems occurred when they had

to handle unprepared discourse especially when their students asked questions out of the materials prepared before or when the teachers have interaction with their students outside the classroom.

Meanwhile, there were teachers who were not professionally prepared as language teachers but they were proficient in English. This group of teachers commonly had previous teaching experience at international schools or immersion programs. None of the teachers who became respondents of this study had experience living abroad. They learned English at schools and the active or passive use of English was more influenced by their own motivation and personalities. For non-English graduate teachers, the ability to use English was a plus point for them as a professional teacher.

There was also a group of teachers who were not professionally prepared as language teachers and they were not proficient in English. These teachers were assigned by schools to teach in English although they were not prepared as language teachers. As a result, they had to struggle with English to teach and deliver their materials. The worse thing was that sometimes their students' English proficiency was better than the teachers' English proficiency. This condition was psychologically threatening the teachers. They did not feel secured and they tended to be anxious with their English while delivering their subjects. The more anxious they were, the harder for them to express ideas in English. From the above description of teachers, it could be sum up that in general, all groups were confronted with professionalism as teachers. In general use, the term 'professional' refers to a trained and qualified specialist who displays a high standard of competent conduct in their practice (Leung in Burn and Richard, 2009, p.49).

Teachers of bilingual schools need to improve all aspects of communicative competence. They have to continually upgrade their knowledge of linguistic systems as well as the formulaic knowledge. They also need to improve their sensitivity of appropriate language use. From the results of the interviews and focus group discussion, the teachers admitted that they hardly had professional training to improve their communicative competence which included the aspects explained above. The trainings they received were more related with teaching techniques and how to use bilingual books. Therefore, the bilingual schools are encouraged to conduct trainings for teachers to improve their communicative competence. The teachers also need to be given a chance to have experience staying abroad.

## CONCLUSION

From the research conducted by the writer, it can be concluded that:

- a. The launching of bilingual programs can be in the form of pure bilingual schools or a program opened as companion to the regular program with a purpose to get more students.
- b. There are some teachers of bilingual schools who are experienced in teaching with English but do not master the subject matters. Commonly, these teachers are English department or English Education program graduates.
- c. There are some teachers of bilingual schools who master the subject matters but they have very little or no experiences in teaching with English. It is due to the fact that English is a foreign language in Indonesia.
- d. Schools do not provide continuous trainings to improve teachers' communicative competence.

Considering the great expectation of parents to make their children bilingual by sending them to schools which use English as the delivery language, bilingual schools need to give more concern on the quality maintenance of the teachers through professional development trainings. One of the most crucial training for the teachers is English training to improve and develop teachers' communicative competence.

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