The Challenges of Studying in an International School

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Abstract

The National Education Regulation No. 78 Year 2009 that allows the establishment of international schools in Indonesia has given opportunity for Indonesian parents who wish to enter their children into schools with English as the medium language. Studying in English medium schools, however, poses certain challenges for the students and one of them is their academic achievement since they have to learn the school subjects in a language that they have not mastered. Nevertheless, King and Fogle (2006) and Colorado (2008) mentioned various ways parents can support their children who study in schools with the second language as the medium of instruction. The aim of this paper is to examine whether the supports from family mentioned by King and Fogle (2006) and Colorado (2008) are able to help the students perform academically in the schools with English as the medium of instruction. This study used questionnaires as the source of data with Grade 11 and 12 students of an international school as the subjects to find out whether their academic achievement in school correlates with the supports given to them. This paper will benefit those in bilingual education sectors and parents who wish to promote the use of English in their schools. This may inform them more on what it takes to make the students successful and what are required to help the students perform academically.

Keywords: *international schools, academic performance, supports from family*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In the last decade, the number of international schools has increased significantly in Indonesia. This significant increase is made possible by the introduction of the Minister of National Education Regulation (*Permendiknas*) No. 78 Year 2009 that allows and regulates the establishment of international-level schools in primary and secondary in Indonesia and one of the goals of this program is to increase the level of competitiveness by demonstrating local excellence at international level. Since then, many legal entities have opened new international schools and thousands of Indonesians who do not wish to attend the

old-fashioned public schools or the national plus schools with their half-hearted international curriculum have flocked to these mushrooming international schools.

According to the data taken from International School Consultancy (ISC) in www.iscresearch.com, there are now more than 100 international schools operating in Indonesia. A UK-based newspaper, The Telegraph, wrote that in 2014, 47% of international school places in Indonesia were taken by wealthy Indonesian families who wanted their children to receive quality English-speaking education and be exposed to international curriculums that in time would provide access to the best universities in the world. Aside from that, Dr Virachai Techavijit, the founder of two international schools in Thailand in his talk at the University of Oxford in 2007, explained that international schools had gained considerable popularity in the last decade because the local parents wanted to improve their children's English proficiency, to get their children to experience studying in an international environment, to improve their social statuses and to benefit from the early networking with other internationally oriented families' children.

Studying in international schools that use English as the medium of instruction poses certain challenges for local students who come from families who do not speak the language. These students are "forced" to become bilingual when they use one language at home and another language at school or they use both languages at home and at school. Children might get the two languages confused. Arnberg (1987, p.27) stated that it is very common for children to mix the two languages without realizing which words belong to which language. They simply use the words that they acquire naturally. Yip & Matthews (2006, p.98) argued that the input space of language exposure for bilingual children between the languages is divided and therefore, smaller than those who are only exposed to one language. When this input is not balanced, one language will be more dominant than the other.

Aside from that, bilingual students also have to cope with learning different school subjects in the new language and use the new language socially in

the school. Fafalois (2007) explains that there are two second language acquisitions occurring in the bilingual or international school environment: First is the rapid language development or social English with speakers learn the surface language patterns and within in a very short time, sound like native speakers. Second is the academic language development or academic English. Academic English requires longer and more complex structures and a larger vocabulary than social English. Studies have shown it takes school-aged bilingual children 5 – 7 years to master academic English and academic English is normally the reason why some students are lagging behind in their school academic performance. www.teacherhorizons.com also mentions the challenges of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) students in the mainstream international school classes:

1. Adjusting the students to the new language system.
2. Lessons and assessments which are normally geared towards more advanced learners.
3. Classes with different levels of English proficiency.
4. The need for extra support from teachers in terms of learning the new language.
5. The availability of resources to support ESL learners.

These academic challenges can be overcome with enough supports from parents and from school. King and Fogle (2006) state that parents can also give supports to help their children learning a second language by interacting with the child in the new language and exposing the child to different types of materials in the new language at home. Moreover, Colorado (2008) gives general tips on how parents can help their children succeed in school:

1. Get to know the school's curriculum
2. Keep an eye on your child's progress and communicate with your child's teachers.
3. Get to know your child's friends.
4. Help your child complete homework and prepare for tests.

5. Provide the necessary books and materials for your child's studies.
6. Talk to your child about the school.
7. Get your child to be organized and to work independently.
8. Get special helps if needed.

However, there has been no study conducted to find out whether these supports are enough to help these students cope with the challenges and succeed in their study in international schools.

The aim of this paper is to examine whether the supports from their families and schools in facing these challenges can help the students perform academically in the school.

1.2 Statement of Research Problem

This study focuses on answering this question:

1. Do academic achievement equal to the amount of various supports received by the students who attend schools with English as the medium of instruction?

2. Definitions of International School

According to the Government Regulation in *lieu* with Law No.48 Year 1960 on the Supervision of Foreign Education System, the definition of international schools is:

1. Schools which are established together with foreign countries' representatives in Indonesia for the purpose of education for children of foreign nationals from the members of the diplomatic representatives for the respective countries.
2. Schools which are established by foundations based on the Indonesian government regulation for the purpose of education for foreign nationals who are not members of the diplomatic representatives from other

countries under the supervision and guidance of the Ministry of National Education.

3. Private schools which use a foreign language as the medium of instruction and/or use a foreign/ international curriculum.

4. Schools which employ half or more than half of foreign nationals in its teaching staff.

5. Students of international schools are foreign nationals and have been proven to have foreign citizenship.

However, to cater to the needs of globalization, this definition has expanded. Nowadays international schools have different aspects embedded in the schools:

1. The quality aspect: schools whose qualities are internationally acknowledge.

2. The network aspect: schools with international networks.

3. The foreign workers' aspect: schools that educate the children of foreign workers.

4. The model development aspect: schools that develop certain educational models.

5. The further study aspect: schools that prepare Indonesian students for studying abroad.

6. The foreign curriculum aspect: schools that develop specific and internationally acclaimed curricula.

7. The diversity of its students; schools with students from different nationalities.

3. The Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

This study used a quantitative approach by using questionnaires to collect data from the subjects. Since there have been no study conducted and no criteria

found to measure the factors contributing to the success in the international school, the factors mentioned by Colorado (2008) as the factors that can help children to succeed in school and King and Fogle (2006) as the factors that can contribute to the success in learning a second language were used as the criteria in the questionnaire.

Q No.	Contributing Factors
The Duration of Learning	
1	Learning English.
4/3	Studying in international school (s).
Supports in Learning the Language	
5	Interaction with the child in the new language.
6	Exposing the child to different types of materials in the new language.
Supports in Learning and for school	
7	Get to know the school's curriculum, communicate with your child's teachers and keep an eye on your child's progress in school, help your child complete homework and prepare for tests and provide the necessary books and materials for your child's studies.
8	Get to know your child's friends.
9	Talk to your child about the school.
10	Extra helps from home for school
Supports from school (additional criteria)	
11	The school provides supports for the new language learners.
Extra Questions are used to find out their reason(s) for choosing the school, but will not be put in data calculation.	
2	The reason for choosing the school
The variable	
15	The result of their study

3.2 Population, Sample, and Source of Data

Students who attended schools with English as the medium of instruction were chosen to be the subjects of this study. A purposive sampling method was used to select the subjects with three similar characteristics. The subjects were

students who: (1) studied in the same international school; (2) who attended Grade 11 and Grade 12 classes (aged 15 – 17); and (3) studied in this school for more than three years. The total number of subjects was 51 students. The source of data was questionnaires filled out by the subjects.

3.3 Procedures

For data collection, all students sat on their own class and fill out the questionnaires. The questionnaires were then collected and analysed.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaires were examined from two different factors:

- The academic achievement (Question no. 15: How are you keeping up with your lessons in school?)
  - ✓ high achievers "I am doing really well" and "I am happy with my scores".
  - ✓ mid achiever "I need to improve my scores".
  - ✓ low achievers "struggling".
- The types of families (Question no. 5: Do your parents speak English at home?)
  - ✓ The students from families who do not speak English at all ("Not at all").
  - ✓ The students from families who speak very little English ("Only a little").
  - ✓ The students from families who only one parent speaks English ("Only one")
  - ✓ The students whose parents speak English, but prefer to use Bahasa Indonesia at home ("They both speak English well, but we use Bahasa Indonesia at home").
  - ✓ The students from English-speaking families ("We use English at home").

3.5 Result Analysis

The result of the questionnaires can be seen in the table:

Table 3.1 Questionnaire Result

			dur. of study in school	dur. of study English	lang. at home	support for English	Support from home	lang. at school	comm. with parents	Extra support	Support from school	
	No. of Question		**1&3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	
	Maximum Score		**4**	**3**	**5**	**4**	**4**	**2**	**2**	**4**	**3**	**31**
Academic Achievement	**Language at Home**											
High Achiever	English, but Indonesian (EI)	1	2	3	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	15
6 resp	Only a little (L)	1	2	3	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	16
	Indonesian (I)	4	2.8	2.8	1	0.8	1.5	1	1.8	1.5	1	14.2
			2.3	**2.9**	**2.3**	**1.3**	**1.2**	**1**	**1.6**	**1.2**	**1**	**15**
Mid Achiever	English	1	3	3	5	2	3	1	2	2	2	24
40 resp	English, but Indonesian	12	2.6	3	4	1.3	2.4	1.2	1.8	1.6	1.6	19.5
	Only one of them	3	2.3	2.3	3	1.3	2	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	16.1
	Only a little	15	2.4	3	2	1.6	2.1	1.1	1.5	1.5	1.3	16.5
	Indonesian	9	2.6	2.9	1	1.2	2	1.1	1.6	1.9	1.4	15.7
			2.58	**2.84**	**3**	**1.48**	**2.3**	**1.14**	**1.64**	**1.66**	**1.52**	**18.36**
Low Achiever	English, but Indonesian	1	2	3	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	16
5 resp	Only one of them	1	2	3	3	3	3	1	2	1	1	20
	Only a little	3	2.3	3	2	2	2	1	2	3.3	1	18.6
	51 resp	51	**2.1**	**3**	**3**	**2**	**2**	**1**	**1.7**	**1.8**	**1**	**18**

From this table, it can be seen that the majority was students with monolingual families (Indonesian-speaking families) with 42/51 families. Out of 51 respondents, only 1 student used English at home, 13 students were with families who spoke English well, but they preferred to use Bahasa Indonesia at

home, 4 students had only one parent speaking English, 16 students had parents who spoke very little English and 13 students used Bahasa Indonesia at home because their parents did not speak English at all.

It can also be seen that the majority was mid achievers or students with average scores and average academic achievements. Out of 51 respondents, only 6 were high achievers, 40 were mid achievers and only 5 were low achievers.

The result also shows that the mid achievers were the ones who received the most support (18.4) while the high achievers received the least support (15). The low achievers had the shortest duration of study (2.1) in the school while the mid achievers had the longest (2.6). The low achievers got the most support for learning English while the mid achievers got the most support for learning at home. The low and mid achievers generally had extra supports in the form of tutors and the mid achievers received the most support from school.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Munoz (2006) states that children who learn language in natural settings, such as their home or their environment, will be more fluent and will achieve superiority over those who learn English in a limited instructed setting such as classrooms. This superiority is also achieved from unlimited exposure to the language. Those who learn the language in instructed settings such as classrooms, however, will take longer to master the language because of the limited exposure to the language. Since the students in this international schools use English only in the classroom, in terms of language development, it will take longer time for them to master and to be fluent in the language. In addition, lack of supports from the families in terms of exposure to the second language makes it difficult for them to improve further. Therefore, most students still prefer to speak Indonesian outside their classrooms. Their social English may have made some improvement but it is not enough to support their academic English and academic achievements in general.

The results proved that the more supports the students get do not mean the students will perform better in school. Students who received the most supports were actually the mid achievers – average students with average scores. The reason why these students became mid-achievers might be because of the supports they received from home or parents or from school. It is not known whether without the supports, these students will be able to maintain the academic achievement. Further investigation is needed to answer this question. Lack of exposure to the second language which is English may have contributed to the limited progress of these students. Students will have difficulties expressing themselves in writing in the new language and their understanding of a certain topic or the ability in understanding English textbooks will also be limited due to the limitation of their academic English or English vocabulary in general.

The low achievers were also shown to receive lack of supports from home and from school since it was probably very difficult for them to keep up with the lessons since the lessons were taught in the language that they had not yet mastered. On the other hands, high achievers receiving the least support is probably because when they entered the school, they were already high achievers equipped with above average English so they were able to concentrate more on mastering the subjects, instead of mastering the language. It was easier from to them to adapt to the use of English in the school and the international curriculum adopted by the school.

In conclusion, parents who wish to enrol their children in international schools need to understand the complexity of attending this kind of school. Those who wish to have their children excel in the school academically need to support their children in terms of language which is English and the lessons in general. Receiving quality international education can mean that more efforts need to be made by the local students and the parents to achieve this standard and lack of these efforts can mean "make it or break it" for the students and it will be traumatizing and frustrating for certain students who fail to meet the standard to continue studying in the school.

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