

The Attitudes towards English Relative to Other Languages in Indonesia: Discrepancies between Policy and Usage

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Abstract : English has surpassed other languages to become the most widely taught and studied foreign language in Indonesia. This reflects the tendency of the Indonesian public to participate in global mainstream culture, which is longstanding but has been greatly facilitated by the widespread availability of television, the traditional media, and more recently the Internet and social media. However, despite increasing exposure and a history of teaching and study, mastery of English remains low, even as interest and perceived importance continue to increase. This along with Indonesia's extremely complex linguistic environment has increased the status and value associated with the use of English and is changing the dynamic of language use nationwide. This study investigates the use of English in public settings in Indonesia as well as the attitudes of Indonesian speakers towards English. A case study was developed to explicate this phenomenon in a major Indonesian city. Fifty individuals, including both professionals and lay people, were interviewed about their language preferences as well as their perceptions about English as compared to other languages, such as the local language, Indonesian as the national language, and other foreign languages. Observations on the use of language in the public environment in advertising, signs, and other forms of public expression were analyzed to identify language preferences at this level and their relationship to current language policy. This study has three major findings. First, Indonesian speakers have more positive attitudes towards English than other languages; second, English has encroached on domains in which Indonesian should be used; and third, perceived awareness of the importance of Indonesian as an introduced national language seems to be declining to suggest a failure of policy. The study includes several recommendations for the future development of language planning in determining and directing language use in a public context in Indonesia.

Keywords : English, Indonesia, language attitudes, language policy

Conference Title : ICALP 2019 : International Conference on Applied Linguistics and Psycholinguistics

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : November 18-19, 2019