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Meeting the needs of offshore learners: A case study of Australian EFL educators and Indonesian EFL learners

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Abstract:

This paper is concerned with Australian educators' experiences of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Central Java, Indonesia. Data were collected from private English language colleges in Jakarta, Central Java, via an interview study with educators who identified as Australian citizens. Employing an analytical framework derived mainly from the work of Basil Bernstein, the paper examines educators' accounts of what is validated as curriculum and how the pedagogic relationship is structured within this offshore context. Moreover, this study reveals how much control the educator and the learner have over the curriculum and the pedagogic relationship, thus raising questions about the space created for cultural difference.

The international education industry

The post war period realised a global boom in the internationalisation of education. Australia's foray into this burgeoning industry was via a two pronged approach: establishing educational institutions offshore or providing educational services for international learners within Australia. Australian universities have already established twinning programs offshore, for example, in Wuhan, China, Malaysia and Singapore. Indonesia presents as a unique market, given that under Indonesian law, non-Indonesian universities and training providers can not establish campuses on Indonesian soil. Nevertheless establishing agencies for foundation courses or 'cooperative agreements' of up to twelve months duration is permissible. Indonesian learners then complete the remainder of their studies in Australia, the United Kingdom, or the United States (or in Germany if the language of study is German). Until permission is granted and all logistics satisfied for the establishment of twinning programs in Indonesia, Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany continue to compete for a share of the short term Indonesian-based market or the longer term host country market.

However, some educationalists and politicians have questioned the ability of Australian educational providers to maximise their share of this competitive international market. Back in 1994 Hughes and Abello (1994:53) cautioned, 'Australia has a long way to go to be competitive with North America and Europe'. For Australia, capturing the highly sought after Asian educational market appeared to be limited by a perception that Australians were ignorant of Asia (Alexander and Rizvi, 1993:16-19) and in terms of education, treated Asian

countries generically, failing to respond to their 'distinctive needs and desires' (Marginson, 1994:243). In reference to the commercial arm of exported Australian education, Queensland's Minister for State Development and Trade, Jim Elder (1999:1), conceded that the United States had traditionally been Australia's greatest competitor for learners from Indonesia, but because the currencies of both Australia and Indonesia had declined against the US dollar, Australia became more competitive. Once world currency imbalances are corrected, Australia's share of the fee paying Indonesian market will be by no means guaranteed. A continued share of this market depends on the quality of educational provisions. Ellis (1996) explained that it was not so much the language barrier that was perceived as a problem, rather there were complexities in terms of sometimes difficult to read sociocultural expectations and assumptions of both educator and learner. Put simply, Australian educational providers must better understand the complexities of the offshore context. This paper introduces the Jakarta case study and provides episodes of educators' talk about curriculum structure and pedagogic practice in their offshore institutions.

Offshore EFL Programs: The Jakarta Case Study

This paper focuses on ten educators who taught at five of the Australian owned EFL colleges in Jakarta. These colleges specialised in preparing Indonesian adult learners for tertiary studies at English speaking universities. On average, educators taught up to eighteen learners at a time in a tutorial format and were responsible for preparing learners for the International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) before the learners undertook Australian based university studies. In all cases the English language colleges did not have to follow the mandated Indonesian national EFL curricula. From fieldwork data, one college manager, Samantha, an Australian citizen who had been teaching in Indonesia for three years, explained that the Indonesian based preparatory course assisted the Indonesian learners with *coping with classes in Australia because [the classes] are not ESL or EFL geared and that it was the language that was difficult.*

Each of the colleges employed between five and fifty-three educators. These educators were native English speakers from Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada or the United States, although one college employed two Indonesian nationals who completed their teaching qualifications in Australia. All ten educators interviewed had between three and ten years experience teaching non-English speaking learners and had internationally recognised teaching qualifications or equivalent. They all identified as Australian citizens and represented an equal split between the sexes. Indonesian nationals held non-academic managerial positions, such as Head of Library or Head of Finance. Indonesian nationals also formed the bulk of the non-academic workforce of administrative clerks, marketing personnel or liaison officers.

This study was conducted as a semi-structured interview case study. Management from the Department of Trade (Queensland) assisted in the identification of sites and cohorts of educators. Participants were selected according to their availability for interviews during the researchers' limited time in this location. All interviews were conducted in essentially the same manner: time was spent before each interview establishing rapport, explaining the purpose of the study and assuring confidentiality of responses. The interviews proceeded in what Frankenberg (1993:30) described as the 'traditional' direction where researchers asked questions from an interview guide and participants answered. Participants also added topics of their own.

Analysis of the interview data involved four stages: interviewing and transcription; separation into episodes; collating themes; and analysing and theorising. The collation of episodes of data revealed two overarching themes: the structure of curriculum and the relations of pedagogy. Within these two broad themes, two main points were identified: (1) The multiple

aims and objectives of the offshore curricula; and (2) Educator control dominated pedagogic practice. Each main point will be dealt with in turn.

The Multiple Aims and Objectives of the Offshore EFL Curricula

All ten educator participants who identified as Australian citizens responded to questions about the aims and objectives of their offshore EFL curriculum. A theme emerged across all participants: offshore EFL curricula had multiple aims and objectives and thus multiple forms of what was considered to be valid content (Bernstein, 1977). Three episodes of data from three participants employed by three of the Australian owned EFL colleges in Jakarta were typical of the responses given by all ten interview participants. Arthur, an Australian EFL educator who had been in Indonesia for four years and had undertaken university studies in Indonesian; Julia, an Australian college manager who had spent three years studying Indonesian and Asian studies at the university level; and Lavinia, an Australian EFL educator who is married to an Indonesian national and has two children of Indonesian citizenship provided the following episodes of data. According to these educators the curricula aims and objectives had a two- part language component and a two-part cross-cultural component. More specifically, the language components focused on English language proficiency as a criteria for university entry as well as what Julia called 'academic English'. The cross-cultural components focused on being a particular type of learner, that is, a learner within an Australian educational institution, and what Lavinia referred to as *practical daily things in Western culture*.

In episode one, the researcher inquired about the structure of the offshore EFL curriculum. Arthur commented on the importance of English language proficiency (as determined by the IELTS) and 'general academic processes' that the students could expect to encounter in the Australian educational context:

Episode One:

Arthur: *I'm working on an EAP program at the moment. It's a six month program with a sort of double aim. First it's to get the learners to 6.5 on the IELTS test, which often dominates, but that's a different story, and the second aim is to teach them general academic processes and writing skills and research skills and just to give them a bit of an idea of the kind of discourse that they can expect when they get to Australia, the academic disciplines that they're involved in.*

Like Arthur, Julia characterised the aims and objectives of offshore EFL curricula in similar terms, citing the need for instruction to focus on a particular type of English instruction in preparation for being a learner at an Australian university. She justified the need for a particular type of English instruction due to the incompatibility of the English the learners were required to produce whilst at school vis-à-vis the English needed for the Australian university context. Furthermore, she noted the incompatibility of the way the Indonesian learners were taught to write essays:

Episode Two:

Julia: *...Basically it was, the whole reason foundation studies was set up is just that the transition from SM3 which is Year 12 here to university, is just the gap is just huge, so we set up this.*

Researcher: *So how do you mediate that gap?*

Julia: *Basically within their high schools, um, for example a learner who is in what they call the (EPS) stream, which is the commerce stream at high school in their last year of high school, they don't, they do no Mathematics, basically that's probably a main issue because when they go to university, doesn't matter if they are doing commerce which is the most popular, mathematics you know, quantitative methods is very important, and also the whole idea even if they have very good English they're never taught in English at school like not Mathematics, and the idea also is not only to make sure their Math is up to standard but their English understanding of what a mathematics term is [*

Researcher: *[through immersion in English?*

Julia: *Exactly so everything's in English and their academic English classes are not about how to speak English or grammar it's about how to write essays for university learners here have, generally speaking of course, making generalisations, have very bad writing skills so they're taught how to write essays.*

According to Lavinia curriculum aims and objectives also included what she called a 'cross-cultural component'. She further divided this cross-cultural component into social interaction in the academic context and in 'practical daily things'. She said that Indonesian EFL learners had a lack of experience in *Western countries* and stated there was a need for these learners to be able to survive in *Western cultures* both inside and outside of the learning context. She also noted differences in attitudes between Indonesian cultures and *Western cultures*:

Episode Three:

Researcher: *Can you tell me something about your courses and learners?*

Lavinia: *Cross-cultural studies is a short training course for specific groups. They might be government pharmacists or workplace safety. They're all government employees, and we had, doctors and social workers. A real range, but they all need the same cross-cultural component because if they haven't had experience with Western countries they tend to have difficulties with the same kind of things. So we look at politeness and respect because you know they tend to want to call everyone Mr and Mrs in front of their family name and they think it is disrespectful to call someone well-qualified, like an academic, by his first name. And so we look at things like politeness and respect in Western culture because we think it is impolite if people don't listen and they often don't listen to each other. When someone gets up the front and starts to make a presentation or even there's a class discussion going on they start talking amongst themselves. So they have very different attitudes to what's considered polite and what's impolite. Practical daily things like banking and money, ways of social interaction, like in Australia you generally call someone before you visit and in Indonesia you don't need to. They are a lot more informal. Um, unspoken rules to do with borrowing things, like in Indonesia if you lend somebody something that's probably the last time you will see it, because if you are close friend they expect you to just give it to them if they need it, that's money, possessions, anything...Um, so that gets them into trouble with Australians if they approach with the same ideas about borrowing.*

In considering these three episodes of data, the multiple aims and objectives of the EFL curricula can be understood by taking account of Bernstein's (1990, 1996) notion of pedagogic discourse. In his work, Bernstein (1990, 1996) explained that teaching transmitted multiple discourses, which he named as a discourse of competence (skills of various kinds) and a discourse of social order (creates the criteria that gives rise to character, conduct and manner). From Arthur's (episode one) and Julia's (episode two) accounts, the discourse of competence was explicitly stated and recorded as English language competence compliant with Australian university expectations. As Arthur detailed, achieved levels of competence could be measured via the IELTS test. It can be inferred from the data that the educators acknowledged the sharply distinguished nature of the English in the EFL curricula vis-à-vis other English programs, such as the ones studied at secondary school. It could be said that boundary maintenance between EFL curricula and studies in English at the secondary school level was strong. In other words, heavy regulation determined what English knowledge the educators could and could not bring into the strongly classified content of EFL curricula (Bernstein, 1977).

The discourse of social order made explicit within the curriculum of Lavinia's (episode three) EFL program related to the social order of being a learner in an Australian educational institution as well as the social order of practical daily things in *Western culture*. This served to socialise the learner into a specific educational identity in terms of character, conduct and manner for the Australian context of learning. The learners needed to be successful at acquiring the character, conduct and manner of an Australian university learner to acquire the content on offer. Thus acquisition of knowledge in Australian universities was regulated by the learner's successful socialisation for the context. In other words, content knowledge could best be taken up by specifically legitimised learners. In this way, strongly regulated knowledge became privileged knowledge for legitimised learners only (Bernstein, 1977).

Although in episode one Arthur stated that the English proficiency instruction dominated in the Indonesian context of learning, Lavinia's episode three narrative alluded to the dominance of successful learner socialisation. Further, her comments pointed to cultural differences between successful learners in the 'traditional' Indonesian context and successful learners in the Australian learning context. How Australian EFL educators interacted with their Indonesian EFL learners is thus a salient focus of examination.

Educator Control of EFL Pedagogic Practice

During the interviews, all ten participants spoke about their pedagogic relationship with their Indonesian learners. Questions moved to the notion of culture and the researcher asked how culture was accounted for in the offshore programs. Marcus, an Australian college manager who had been in Jakarta for two and a half years and had previously undertaken a similar role in Japan, responded to a researcher's question concerning the needs of the Indonesian learners. Marcus said that his institution was *very sensitive to any particular cultural needs concerning prayer times, for example, [and] religious holidays, all of our schedules are programmed around that*. In Marcus's account, responding to the cultural needs of Indonesian learners was limited to organisational issues rather than incorporated into the relations of pedagogy. Marcus further explained that his institution *recruited learners from a variety of backgrounds*. He was pointing to the multitude of differences that existed in terms of Indonesian learners' religions and cultures. Four more Australian educators spoke about the manifold differences in religion and culture within the cohort of Indonesian students within their classes.

Further discussion with the ten participants centred on the selection of pedagogic practice and the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the Indonesian EFL learners. The educators nominated perceived differences between the learning experiences in the Indonesian

educational system and the experiences of learners in the Australian university context. What was salient, however, was that these perceived differences were not seen as significant and according to the educators' accounts, the learners, once aware of these differences, could bridge the gap *with ease*. Again, three episodes of data (episodes four to six) presented as typical of the responses for all ten interview participants. Arthur (the EFL educator introduced in episode one), Angus, an Australian EFL educator who had been teaching at his institution for eight years and Lavinia (the EFL educator introduced in episode three) contrasted the structuring of pedagogical relationships in Indonesian EFL classes and the structuring of pedagogical relationships between educators and learners in Australian universities. In addition, Lavinia detailed teaching strategies that she has used to *take away* the Indonesian learner identity and replace it with an Australian learner identity.

In talking about his pedagogic practice, in episode four, below, Arthur justified the need to replicate what he perceived as Australian pedagogy:

Episode Four:

Researcher: *Do they speak Indonesian to each other much in the class?*

Arthur: *Ah, not a lot, but it happens a bit. You know, it's hard to even specify but probably there'd be one or two people in every class that would probably say something in Indonesian, and we try to discourage that actually for good or bad reasons.*

Researcher: *Is that a policy thing or is that just an individual teacher preference?*

Arthur: *It's partly individual teacher preference, but I think that the [college] obviously would try to encourage learners to speak English in their English classes, but the extent to which a teacher will enforce that is up to the teacher themselves.*

Researcher: *Is Indonesian culture incorporated into the programs? Is there an attempt to consciously tap into the things the learners are assuming to bring with them, or are we sort of in a generalised EFL environment?*

Arthur: *Yeah, I think the syllabus is a fairly generalised syllabus, and I think the way that a teacher focuses on particular elements of a syllabus more than another is perhaps reflective of the way the teacher or how much the teacher perceives that to be a more important skill for their particular class, but I think you could pick up our syllabus and probably our files and put them down in any country and teach EFL using the same materials. So it really is up to the teacher in selecting materials.*

Arthur's narrative highlighted the dominant role of the educator in determining how curriculum content was transmitted. According to Arthur Indonesian learners had limited control within the pedagogical relationship with their offshore educators. This narrative also suggested that educator dominance of pedagogical relations in EFL instruction was typical regardless of the context in question.

In the following extract of data from Angus, an Australian EFL college manager, talk centred on differences between 'Asian' and 'Western' pedagogies. Although Angus struggled with the semantics of labelling for these groups and the issues involved with creating stereotypes, he provided the following discussion:

Episode Five:

Researcher: *Is there a distinct difference in terms of behaving "Asian" and behaving "Western" or behaving as an Indonesian teacher and behaving as a "Western" teacher?*

Angus: *Yeah, I think so....it's the way that teachers I guess manage the classroom, relate to their learners. I do feel uncomfortable saying "Asian" teachers.[In] Indonesia, there are certain ways in which traditionally teachers have managed classrooms. Their expectation of their learners, the learners' expectation of their teachers and so on, and I think western teachers play a different role, see themselves differently...it's really these things are always difficult to talk about because you go into stereotypes, and you feel uncomfortable and then I've seen some excellent English language lessons with Indonesian teachers teaching Indonesian learners which have been "active communicative"....But generally I would say there is a tradition of pacify amongst learners, teacher centred lessons, a focus on modelling correct language, a focus on I think a mode of punishment in Indonesian classes rather than a reward, um, so I think a lot of teacher talk. They're also very big classes...[and] it seems to be very difficult for them to move away from the teacher as the centre of the classroom, that whole "guru" kind of thing. I know that's stereotyping....*

Researcher: *Sure, sure. Australian teachers, western teaching style?*

Angus: *Um, much more varied. And then there's some of that amongst western teachers. .. I suppose we would like to think, and I suppose there is a more of a focus on learners and learning, less teacher domination in terms of the amount of teacher talk, a lot more pair-work, group-work, learners work with each other. Much more of a focus on independent and individualised learning....We have a couple of teachers here who I think talk too much in the classroom. They perform too much...*

In describing the pedagogical relations between Indonesian EFL educators and Indonesian EFL learners, Angus noted the following descriptors: teacher centred lessons, passive learners and a mode of punishment in Indonesian classes rather than a reward. He suggested that these pedagogical relations might have been the result of very big class sizes and the positioning of educators as *gurus*. Angus's observations paralleled Lewis' 1996 study that found in English class with Indonesian EFL educators, Indonesian learners reported learning from the authorised textbook, *Bahasa Inggris*. Although this new curriculum and textbook embraced a semi-communicative methodology, with an emphasis on spoken proficiency, according to Lewis (1996:29) educators still favoured the traditional model of grammar-translation and direct method. In a study of 320 Indonesian EFL learners' learning styles in the context of urban and rural Java, Lewis (1996) explained, for the most part, Indonesian learners were silent, occasionally completing pronunciation drills or answering comprehension questions on the readings or grammar exercises. Class time was spent copying from the blackboard and translating texts or vocabulary from English to Indonesian. In short, Indonesian learners were constructed as mere recipients of knowledge and had little control over the structuring of the pedagogical relations with their Indonesian EFL educators.

In contrast, he constructed Australian EFL educators as generally focusing more on learners and learning, less teacher domination, a lot more pair-work and group work and introducing independent and individualised learning. What was important about Angus's narrative was

that he did not position the different pedagogical styles within a hierarchy and just as importantly, he noted that there were exceptions to these generalised constructions. His observations were supported by Jacobs and Ratmanida's 1996 questionnaire and interview study with Asian ELF educators, some of whom were Indonesian ELF educators, that confirmed an overall trend towards communicative methodology and group activities.

In analysing Angus's account, it was the locus of control over pedagogic communication that was of the most interest. In Bernsteinian terms (1971), this locus on control referred to the strength of the boundary between what entered and did not enter the pedagogical relationship. In episode five, Angus constructed the Indonesian EFL educators as having strong control over the form of pedagogic practice whilst their learners had little right of control. Although strong, educator control could never be described as absolute; both educator and learner must work within an expected or an accepted pedagogical frame (Bernstein, 1996).

Although Angus's narrative highlighted differences between Indonesian EFL educators and Australian EFL educators in terms of the structuring of the pedagogical frame, control over pedagogical practices still did not lie with the Indonesian learners to any significant degree. Thus it could be said that Australian EFL educators still dominated the pedagogical relationship. The Indonesian learners were not permitted to dominate the relationship.

In talking about the structuring of her pedagogical practice, Lavinia explained how she used group discussion and role play to prepare her Indonesian learners for the Australian context of learning:

Episode Six:

Lavinia:another thing I cover is giving opinions because I said, 'Australians are very forthright with their opinions and tend to directly disagree with each other and in academic circles you are encouraged to do that too. You know if everybody in a tutorial sits around and says, 'we agree sir with everything you say', the lecturer is very disappointed. That's not going to encourage intellectual debate and creative thought. He wants people to disagree and he even plays a devil's advocate so people have something to knock down. And this to them is really strange because to show respect for an academic in Indonesia and the elders in general, people older than you, you just say, 'Yes sir, yes sir' to everything they say, no matter what you think yourself.... My teaching style, I try to put them in groups to discuss things where I think they won't be open in front of the whole class. So particularly those difficult questions, I break them into groups and hand them a card each and I say, 'When you're got this card in your hand, you're an Australian asking the question', so that identity is taken away from them and they can be a little more candid, we hope.

Despite using strategies that would be consistent with active communicative pedagogy, the Indonesian EFL learners were not accorded significantly more control. For example, there was no space for them to bring their own pedagogic identity into this relationship. Lavinia legitimised this strong control of the rules of communication for pedagogic practice as she wanted to explicitly alter the identity of her Indonesian learners from a seniority focus, where respect was accorded to people older than oneself, to a pedagogic identity that she considered to be more Australian. The thrust of her practice was to reposition these learners as multinational learners who could learn within internationalised education. Although her pedagogic practice may have implied more freedom in the pedagogic relationship, in reality,

relations of pedagogic authority were still strongly controlled. The Indonesian EFL learners were still expected to internalise what was expected.

The strong educator control evidenced in Arthur's, Angus's and Lavinia's accounts could be considered as a way of making the learning safe. Bernstein (1977, p. 476) explained how strong educator control over pedagogical practice acted selectively on the possibilities of an agent's actions 'by creating through time a sense of inevitability of a given social arrangement, and through limiting the means of permitted change'. The safe discourses of strong pedagogical control served the interests of both educator and learner as confrontation was avoided, the learning context was unambiguous and settled and both educator and learners could supposedly focus on the uptake of the validated curriculum.

Discussion: Responding to Indonesian learners' needs

In returning to the earlier claim from Marginson (1994:243) that Australian educational providers needed to better meet the needs of offshore learners, commentary from these ten educators suggested that Indonesian EFL learners' needs were not founded in curriculum and pedagogy. The educators gave two reasons for not subscribing to familiar structures of pedagogy for these students. It will be recalled that Samantha said that Australian based studies were not geared for EFL/ESL learners. Furthermore, Marcus and Angus, in separate interviews, spoke about the manifold differences between Indonesian learners. These educators maintained a focus on the students' future context of learning, that is, the Australian context. The educators argued that Indonesian EFL learners, like all offshore EFL learners, needed to master the IELTS for university entry and non-measurable aspects such as English for academic purposes and take up the conduct, character and manner of an Australian learner. It can be seen that the educators subscribed to the notion that strong educator control within the pedagogic relationship produced the social order of the pedagogic act to enhance the uptake of the validated curriculum content. This made the discourse of pedagogic practice an implicitly dominant discourse of teaching and learning. As learners successfully participated in the strongly controlled pedagogic relationship, so too were they enabled to enter into possession of the discourses of social skills and competence. Pedagogic learners were thereby apprenticed into behavioural skills, attitudes, procedures and forms of knowledge which enabled them to acquire both the competence and conduct, character and manner deemed necessary for success within offshore EFL programs and for the learners' studies in Australian universities.

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper was to analyse how Australian EFL educators accounted for the needs of Indonesian EFL learners. In particular, this paper examined educators' accounts of the structuring of curriculum and the nature of their pedagogic relationships in an attempt to better understand the complexities of these offshore contexts. The analysis of interview data with ten educator participants revealed the multifaceted nature of the validated curricula for Indonesia EFL learners and the maintenance of strong control over the pedagogic relationship between EFL educators and Indonesian EFL learners. The small number of educator interviews limits the findings reported in this paper. However, given that discourses of educational institutions are in many ways similar, it would be likely there would be similar findings in other offshore educational situations.

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