

English Study Program No Longer A Choice?: An insight in the midst of the many choices of higher education study programs in Indonesia

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**English Study Program No Longer A Choice?:
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study programs in Indonesia**

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Abstract: *In Indonesia, English study program is considered on of the oldest study programs which in the past became one of the highest preference of high school leavers who wish to study English further in higher education level. This is due to, among others, opening more work opportunity after graduation. With the many choices of study programs offered by higher education in Indonesia, nowadays, however, the interests of high school leavers are into more 'sophisticated' or more professional study programs while the mastery of English language can be obtained through informal English language courses. This paper will discuss whether English study program is still high school leaver's preference and what are students' expectation of choosing this study program. Interviews with first year students of English study program was also conducted to gain insights of their choice for future work.*

Introduction

English/Language and/or Language and Literature study program or commonly known as *Program Studi Sastra* is considered a 'classic' study program in Indonesia. It was quite popular back then because English is the first foreign language in Indonesia and the international language of the world and people wanting to study English in tertiary level, could go to (a) English study program or (b) English Teaching, in a 4-year degree program or a 3-year non degree program. The study program is also still popular among the highschool leavers--according to several surveys in the media-- although in more than 175 institutions in the country (<http://forlap.dikti.go.id/prodi>) which opens the program, some admitted that the number of recruit declines.

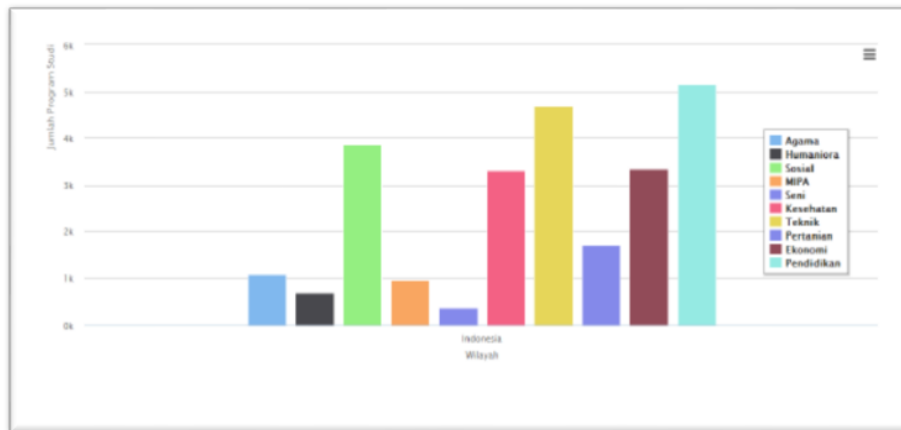
The tendency of high school leavers choosing study programs changes every year although some study programs remain favourite like Medicine or Law. New study programs are also offered. Communication which used to be a study program is now in several institutions has become a faculty with a more specific study programs, such as, Public Relations, Journalism, Communication Management, etc. This shows that more attractive and specific study programs are offered to the community which makes their choices more narrowed to the field they are going to take.

This paper will discuss about whether English is still one of the top choices of high school leavers amongst the many study programs in Indonesia and how to make English study exist in Indonesia.

2 Glimpse of The English Study Program in Indonesia

Higher education institutions in Indonesia has a lot to offer. There are 25.128 study programs in more than 4200 HEIs in Indonesia that around 1.1 million --out of 1.4 million

high school leavers who wish continue to higher education -- can choose from NAD province in the west to Papua in the east. Table 1 below shows the types of colleges and the number of study programs offered and the number of students in each college in Indonesia.



<http://forlap.dikti.go.id/>

Figure 1: Study programs according to branches of sciences

English study programs falls under Humanities in the 2014 study program nomenclature in Indonesia¹. The question is, if English study program claims that it gives graduate to get various jobs when they graduate, as some of the institutions claim in their brochures, how come there are only 2%² of the total number of HE students (in 175 English study programs in Indonesia)?

Table 1: Number of Study Program and Students in Indonesia

Branch of Science	Number of Study Programs Offered	Number of registered students
Religion	1.080	81.609
Humanities	687	127.018
Social Sciences	3.860	851.119
Math and Natural Science	959	159.442
Arts	367	48.379
Health Sciences	3.313	524.141
Engineering	4.615	973.008
Agriculture	1.729	278.971
Economics	3.347	1.102.402
Education	5.171	1.279.211
Total	25.128	5.425.300

¹ Some study programs in 2017 Minister's degree may belong to different branches of sciences as stated in the Minister of Education and Culture Number 154/2014

² data (2%) as of 2006; current data is, unfortunately, non existent

The construction of English study program curriculum in Indonesia consist at least three of these compulsory courses: English language skills, Linguistics and/or applied Linguistics, Literature, and Culture. The curriculum is then strengthened with courses that may add skills for work purposes, should the graduates decide not to work in the areas of language and/or literature. They will use their language skills (English) to work in other fields that require the competence. It is therefore common to find courses that are not closely connected to the compulsory courses above,³ such as journalism, public relations, tourism, or even business courses. This is allowed and stated in the Decree of Minister of Education and Culture Number 045/U/2002 as additional competencies that will add values to the graduates for their future employment possibilities.

In the course of time, the curricula have been developed to give more room to applied science courses while retaining language courses. The number of credits attained for a *Sarjana* (Bachelor's) degree was also adjusted-- to be more competitive, as some claimed. It ranges from 144 – 160 and institutions are allowed to decide how many credits to be attained in order to complete a degree program in their respective study programs. Many institutions decide to apply the minimum credit units, i.e. 144.

⁶
In 2017, based on the Minister of Research, Technology and Higher Education Decree Number 15/2017, study programs in Indonesia have to adjust the names according⁵ the new study program nomenclatures in Indonesia. In the decree, it is stated that higher education institutions are obliged to adjust the names of the study programs (Chapter 7, point (1)). These new nomenclatures were structured with reference to the branches of sciences, Indonesian Qualification Framework and international naming of study programs.

With this decree, higher education institutions can propose an adjustment or change of the name of the study program by submitting curriculum, learning outcomes and science development reference (Chapter 6, points (1) and (2)). The change stated in the decree was discussed in the 2nd congress of ESAI (English Study Association in Indonesia) in May 2017. The congress discussed about the change of study program nomenclature because it concern one of the study program under the association, ie. *Sastra Inggris* (literally means English Literature). *Sastra Inggris* study program has to change its name into other name. Many institutions were 'forced' to change their *Sastra Inggris* study program into "*Bahasa Inggris*" (English Language) because the curriculum and the learning outcome are into language competency than literature competency. The name of the study program must define the content--curriculum and learning outcomes--of the study program. Institutions that wish to retain their (old) name (*Sastra*, particularly) must revisit their curriculum and put more weight on courses which represent the name of the study program. The congress then proposed 4 names, namely, English, Linguistics, Literature, and Literature and Culture. All *Sastra* study programs are expected to adjust accordingly. Language and Literature study program cannot be retained because language and literature do not belong to the same branch.

English Study Program Still the Choice?

In the previous section, we have discussed that amongst 5.4 million students in higher education² level in Indonesia, only around 2% pursue their studies in English study programs. The number is very small compared to the total number of Indonesian students.

For the purpose of writing this paper, a selected 5 first year students of *Sastra* Study Program of Universitas Kristen Indonesia were interviewed, aiming at gaining information about their decisions, ie. enrolling in English study program. They were picked randomly because the purpose was only to get a general information about their choices and whether English was their first choice among other study programs. The 2% of the total number of students is rather stable for the past 10 years therefore it is important to see whether the shigher education institututions have not done enough to promote the study program while the demand for their graduates is still high.

The questions raised were (1) Was English study program your first choice in HE? If your answer is 'NO' then what was your choice? (2) a Do you think the courses (so far) meet your expectation of studying at English study program? (3) What kind of job/career will you pursue after graduation/in the future? (4) Do you think your study at English study program help you in getting into your dream job?

The responses from the the students were not really surprising. Concerning favourite study programs among high school students in their respective schools, they list Fashion and Design, Tourism, Management, Accounting, Medicine, Psychology, and Law. The first is aimed at producing graduates for a specific jobs (sounds 'sophisticated'). and the others are considered classic choices of high school leavers. Except for tourism, Management, Accounting, Medicine, Psychology, and Law until today still belong to favourite study programs amongst high school students. Management and Accounting belong to Economics science, which constitutes the second largest number of students after education.

For the respondents themselves, English study program was not their first choices. Their first choices were Communication, Television dan Film, Korean Language and Culture, and Fashion Design. This is not surprising either although one respondent further explains that English was the closest choice that could get him to the dream jobs he is going to pursue in the future and the other explain that at least English study program is still a language program although she first aimed at Korean study. They seemed happy with their choices after they started studying and when asked what careers they want to pursue eventually, their responses are designer, reporter, translator, and editor. They all agree that English study program will definitely help them in pursuing their respective careers in the future.

Another interesting information from the respondents was that before they started, they assumed that English study program (*Sastra*, paticularly) was a study program that dealt with (only) language (English) and they had no idea that it would deal with literature studies. One respondent says that for her high school classmates, English (study program) was less popular compared to German or Korea (study programs). However, when she was further asked to give further explanation about why they were more popular than English, she cannot answer. This is very interesting how high school students' preferences of study programs changes from time to time. The boming of Korean movies, boy/girl bands may influence their interest in the country and everything which is associated with Korea. Another explanation is that *Sastra*, for them, is about language so their choices of *Sastra* study program other than *Sastra Inggris* may be driven from their intention to learn a foreign language other than English.

Although not the first choice, studying at English study program will eventually open the students' horizon into various careers job market has to offer. I am sure that the respondent who responds that he would pursue a career in translation did not have that particular career in mind before he studied at our institution because his first choice was not English study program or even a language study program. This is a very important finding because this first year students have already had a field-related career in mind.

Career Development Program

Some studies revealed that most of high school leavers are actually influenced by others when it comes to deciding study programs when they continue their studies in higher education. The closest influence possible is the parents. For example, students pursuing medicine, for example, may have parents who are medical doctors or students pursuing law may come from a long line of lawyers in a family. After parents, the next most possible influences are friends and teachers at school. Without such influence, high school leavers may have no ideas of career or kinds of study programs they will pursue. Therefore it is also our responsibilities to promote the study programs to the community, so that they will have a picture of what English study program is.

Career of the graduates is also an important thing for the existence of a study program. In order to attract entrants, we have to promote careers after graduation to the community. Institution must keep records not only of the students, but also of their graduates. The results of Universitas Kristen Indonesia's 2013 and 2014 tracer studies show that the graduates of English study programs proves to have the shortest transition period to the first job (≤ 2 months) compared to other study programs and English proficiency proves to be their key to speedy recruitment after graduation. These two findings are only the start for a very good promotion for the study program, actually, but when looking into the findings of the reasons they were hired, the highest responses was English proficiency. A question arises upon this finding: what happen to other competencies nurtured during study: literary studies, linguistics? Were there no job opportunities that require literary analytical skills or linguistics knowledge, for example? If only English language skills that open their opportunities to the market, then why not take informal English language course?

It is very important to introduce careers as early as first year. The findings from the interviews in the previous chapter describe that their knowledge of the study program is very limited. What careers to pursue with a set of competencies gained during studies and what opportunities that labour market will offer to the graduates must be discussed during the studies so they will prepare themselves better during their studies. The chances of working in jobs which are highly related to the study programs are 50/50 with those which are not (horizontal mismatch) must also be discuss for better preparation.

Career for English Study Program Graduates

"Earning a degree in today's job market allows you to apply for positions that you may not be able to apply for without a degree. Earning a degree gives you more opportunities than a person without a degree." (<http://www.chronicle.com/items/biz/pdf/Employers%20Survey.pdf>)

The above clearly states that the purpose of high school leavers going to higher education is to get broader opportunities in the job market. The degree (not only the skills) helps them in getting into the job although it does not necessarily mean it will take you to the job

of their dreams. Because higher education will help them get into their jobs, high school leavers choose the study programs which will make them get closer into the job they hope to get.

Besides, a degree is an additional value to the competences because according to ⁴ *The Role of Higher Education in Career Development: Employer Perceptions*, a degree indicates that one has already proven to be discipline and motivation. He or she is responsible, proven by completion of a (study) program.

¹ English study program is considered to be a non-professional study program (Sitepu, 2011) since job options and career prospects for the graduates vary, not really close¹ related to the field of study compared to, for example, an Engineering study program. This is also emphasized by Brennan, et al.:

According to conventional wisdom, fields of study differ substantially according to their relationships to the world of work. This is confirmed by employment data in the relationship between field of study and occupation: whereas graduates from some fields are most likely to transfer to 'corresponding' professions, graduates from other fields will be widely dispersed. (in Brennan, et al., 1996: 14).

When the purpose of enrolling into English study program is to master the English language for more job opportunities when students are graduated, then it is also our responsibilities to introduce them to the various jobs that require certain competencies they will acquire when they study. For example, a career in journalism may be an option for the graduate, although not necessarily related to the study program, therefore, courses in cultural studies will (still) help them in getting close to a community or understanding values in the community, for example. Another example of a field-related job such as Editor which requires a broad knowledge linguistics and also writing skills. Ikapi (*Ikatan Penerbit di Indonesia*—Association of Publishing Houses in Indonesia) has 1246 members (<http://www.ikapi.org>) and the demand for writers and editors will be definitely high. Other careers are translators and interpreters which are high in demand, especially with the growing number of mass media—printing, electronics, online are wide open. The creative industry in the country that benefits from individual creativity and skills opens new opportunities to graduates with specific competencies such as writing for script writing, advertisement, promotion, etc.

When discussing career, however, it must be kept in mind that traditional graduate jobs are disappearing and nature of graduate careers is changing:

Changes in the organisation of business have effectively put an end to the 'graduate job' (Harvey, Moon and Geall, 1997). The Association of Graduate Recruiters now defines a graduate job as any job that a graduate does. This is not a fatuous response to a changing situation but one that reflects the diversity of graduate employment. It is also indicative of a growing tendency for graduates 'to grow jobs' within the organisation structures, beyond fairly narrowly designated sets of tasks, to entirely new roles that respond to or anticipate the constant changes in the world of work (Harvey 1999: 8).

The above states clearly the diversity of graduate employment. So, graduate jobs are not like in the 70es. The dynamic job market will offer many (new) opportunities to English study program. Such opportunities are open for English study program graduates. We just need to help students so that they can 'surf' with flexibility in the future.

Conclusion

There are still 175 English study programs in Indonesia. Although not always the first choice and less popular compared to other study programs among high school students, English study program still admits students every year. High school students's knowledge of English study program is limited and their preference of study programs changes. It is more of a trend. It is therefore important to promote English study program to the community. The community tend to relate study programs to job opportunities the market offer, as a consequence, they choose study programs whose name directly indicate their future job, such as tourism or psychology study programs. English as a study program is most of the time related to the study of the language.

Despite the static number of students, or for some institutions, decreasing, job opportunities for its graduates are widely open and tend to become more and vary, especially with the gowing of serevice or creative industries in Indonesia. It is therefore important to introduce career prospects to the students of English study program so that the study program is promoted among the students. Promotion to high school students and teachers, in particular, and the community, in general, has to be done regularly so that the program will attract more entrants in the future.

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