Managing change in Indonesian high schools

Brian Tomlinson

This article describes the classroom methodology used by high school teachers of English participating in the PKG (Permantapan Kerja Guru: Strengthening of the Work of Teachers) Project in Indonesia. It starts with brief accounts of the objectives and methods of implementation of the Project and describes classroom methodology before the PKG English Programme began. It then outlines the principles and procedures used by PKG teachers of English and reports early impressions of their effectiveness. It also looks at ways in which the changes were effected and touches upon some of the project's implications.

Background to the Project

The PKG Project is a teacher development programme which aims to help teachers in Indonesian junior and senior high schools to develop their confidence and their personal and professional skills, as well as to devise materials and techniques which promote student-centred, student-active learning in the classroom. The project began in 1980 with its Science Programme. In 1982 it was extended to Maths, in 1985 to English, and in 1988 to Bahasa Indonesia. It is a Government of Indonesia project, funded by loans from the World Bank and UNDP and administered from the Directorate of Secondary and General Education. My own contribution was as an ODA KELTA, working as English Language Teaching Advisor in the Ministry of Education and Culture from December 1985 to December 1988.

The motto

The motto of the Project is 'From the teacher, by the teacher, and for the teacher' (Suprapto, 1986). Every effort has been made to avoid the typical mistakes of top-down projects which impose innovation on implementers who have not been allowed to make any personal investment in their project. On the PKG Project we agree that 'the more the responsibility for the project and the decisions to be taken are passed to the implementers the better, as this will encourage ownership' (Kennedy, 1988).

Organization

In each of the twenty-seven provinces of the country, three or four teachers in each of the PKG subjects were selected to be trained as Instructors. After participating in courses overseas and workshops in Indonesia, these teachers returned to their schools for one semester to try out the learner-centred methodology they had been introduced to. Then they started to run sixteen-week in/on-service courses in their provinces for thirty to forty teachers of their subject. Each of these courses consists of a two-
week intensive course in the provincial capital (in-service), followed by six weeks in the classroom (on-service) during which the participants meet together once a week with the Instructors and are observed five times by them. Then there is another two weeks of in-service, followed by another six weeks of on-service with observations and weekly meetings. During these courses there is no formal evaluation of the teachers and the feedback on their teaching is developmental rather than judgemental. However, outstanding participants on these courses are invited to return to do another in/on-service cycle, and then become either Assistant Instructors working on the in/on-service courses or Key Teachers responsible for running Sanggars (shorter in/on-service courses run simultaneously in each of the sub-regencies of the provinces). In each province PKG in/on-service courses and Sanggars are now run twice a year.

In PKG English, each province makes its own final decisions on the content and methodology of its teachers’ courses. The decisions are based on principles agreed at the twice-yearly National Workshops for PKG English Instructors. There are differences of weighting and style, but in all provinces the mode of ‘training’ is experiential and developmental. Techniques of teaching are used which mirror those advocated by the Instructors for use with the students in the schools.

The PKG English approach

Background

Before the implementation of the PKG English Programme, the typical English lesson in the high schools used Bahasa Indonesia as the medium of instruction. Lessons involved a teacher-centred mixture of audio-visual, structural, and grammar-translation techniques, often directed at teaching students about the language. The result was that after six years of learning about English most students could not use the language at all to achieve communication.

On the PKG English Programme, it was decided to develop a communicative approach to the teaching of English which would meet the long-term needs and fit the circumstances of students learning English in Indonesian high schools. We originally labelled our methodology the ‘communicative approach’, but changed it to the ‘PKG approach’ when we realized how many different interpretations and misunderstandings of ‘communicative’ prevailed in Indonesia (e.g., ‘communicative means oral’; ‘communicative means functional’).

Objectives
The long term

As the PKG English Programme developed, we drew up the following long-term objectives for the teaching of English in high schools:

1 to enable the students to develop communicative competence in all four language skills and in particular to develop the skills of effective reading, the main stated objective of the official curriculum;

2 to develop a base of fluency and accuracy which would enable school leavers to:
   a. benefit from tertiary and/or specialist training;
   b. operate effectively in occupational or social situations involving the use of English;

3 to contribute positively to the general educational development of the
students, the majority of whom will leave school without any instrumental need to use English.

The short term

In order to help us to achieve the long-term objectives stated above, we drew up the following short-term objectives for any teacher introducing a class to the PKG approach. The teacher's aims are:

1. to motivate the students to want to learn to use English;
2. to help the students to gain confidence in their ability to communicate in English;
3. to provide the students with the purposeful exposure to meaningful English which is unavailable to most students in their non-school environment;
4. to provide the students with learning opportunities which focus on using English for communication;
5. to enable the students to gain mentally and socially from participating in stimulating, student-centred activities;
6. to enable the students to develop the skills of independent learning which will help them to continue to learn English after leaving school.

Principles

The PKG English Programme has developed a methodology based on an adaptation of Krashen's Monitor Model (Krashen, 1982). The adaptation takes into account the learning and teaching experiences of the project participants as well as the criticisms of the many 'Krashen-bashers' (eg McLaughlin, 1987). This methodology combines informal classroom language acquisition with formal language learning, in order to help students develop skills which they can use in the production and reception of English, both in situations in which spontaneous communication is required and in situations which allow them the time to reflect, analyse, and/or compose. The basic methodological principles developed by the participants of the PKG English Programme are:

1. The teacher should use English whenever possible in the English lesson in order to:
   a. help the students to become familiar and comfortable with English;
   b. provide the students with exposure to comprehensible and meaningful English;
   c. provide a model for natural pronunciation.
2. The teacher should encourage the students to produce English themselves but should not force them to do so.
3. The teacher should monitor student production of English so as to gain information which will subsequently help him/her to guide the students towards improved performance. But the teacher should not respond to student communication in English in a judgemental or overtly corrective way.
4. The teacher should try to create a positive rapport with the students and a non-judgemental, non-threatening atmosphere so as to help the students become relaxed and confident learners.
5. The teacher should expose the students to different varieties, styles, and registers of English, and should try to make this input as meaningful and comprehensible as possible by:
a. the use of pre-reading/listening activities which activate the students, relevant schema (Carrell, Devine, and Eskey, 1988: 248–254);
b. using realia, visual aids, simulation, drama, etc to apply the ‘here and now’ principle (see Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, 1982: 26–29);
c. the use of materials relevant to the students’ own world and interests;
d. the use of Total Physical Response techniques (see below);
e. the use of ‘good friends’—i.e. words which are similar in form and meaning in English and Bahasa Indonesia (Tomlinson, 1987), e.g. glass/gelas;
f. using pair and group work to enable students to pool their resources and help each other to understand the input.

6 The teacher should help the students to develop communication skills in English by:
a. teaching them techniques for the effective use of specific sub-skills;
b. giving them activities to do which involve the use of specific sub-skills;
c. getting the students to reflect critically on their use of specific sub-skills.

7 The teacher should enable the students to develop their conscious awareness of the semantic and syntactic systems of English by helping them to discover generalizations for themselves.

8 All the lessons should be basically learner-centred and the students should learn by doing rather than by receiving.

**The components of the PKG approach**

The components of the PKG approach are to a large extent determined by the content of the curriculum and of the officially approved textbooks, but we have introduced some innovations which we think help the teacher to cover the curriculum as effectively as possible.

**Total Physical Response**

In most provinces the students in Class 1 of the junior high schools who are taught by PKG teachers spend the first five or six weeks of their English course (five 45-minute lessons per week) responding to instructions in English from their teacher. The responses are mainly physical and involve individual, small group, and whole class reactions to contextualized instructions—for example, Teacher: ‘Who lives on Jalan Heng Lekir? Stand up if you live on Jalan Heng Lekir. Henny, take four flowers from the vase on my table. Give a flower to each student who lives on Jalan Heng Lekir’. Some of the responses also involve drawing or simple writing, and some involve group reading in English and group discussion in Indonesian.

Using TPR, the teachers are able to introduce most of the vocabulary and structures in the curriculum for Semester 1 in a way which interests and involves the students and does not judge or threaten them at all. In this way, teachers are also able to introduce many of the communicatively significant structures, such as relative clauses and the first conditional, which

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are usually saved until later in the course because of their formal complexity. For example, 'Give the flowers to the girl who is wearing a red watch. If I cry, touch the shoulder of the person next to you.'

This same approach of beginning with TPR is used in some provinces for students in other classes in junior and senior high schools who have had English lessons before but have not been exposed to English in use. The introduction of TPR has been controversial, and many experts and administrators are unhappy because it is not possible to use the authorized textbooks and use TPR at the same time, it is not possible to follow the exact sequencing and grouping of items in the curriculum, and it is difficult to set tests for the students. However, the PKG instructors would argue that TPR is a very effective way of covering the curriculum, and that it is extremely beneficial to the students to delay textbook reading and formal testing at the beginning of a foreign language course.

At first, many of the TPR lessons were rather tedious because the teachers had a very limited repertoire of command types and were reluctant to introduce 'fun' into the traditionally serious atmosphere of the classroom. Also, some of the lessons were threatening, because individuals were made to perform in front of the class and became some lessons restricted most of the class to the role of passive audience for most of the time. However, the teachers developed confidence and sensitivity from experience and at workshops we developed new TPR scripts based on certain guidelines. These are:

1. When introducing new items make sure all the students watch, listen, and then respond.
2. Get the whole class to respond to an instruction first, then small groups, and finally individuals.
3. Make use of a great variety of types of activity in the same lesson.
4. Involve all the students all the time (e.g., if a small group is being asked to respond to instructions tell the rest of the class, for example, to put both their hands up if all of the group respond correctly and to hold their noses if any of the group get any of the instructions wrong).
5. Use novelty, incongruity, and the bizarre to achieve the sort of impact which is memorable. For example, ask the students to draw a bird sleeping on the head of an old man rather than sleeping on a nest.

Now that we are following these principles, TPR is becoming so popular with the students that the windows are often crowded with students who have a free period during a TPR lesson. The students often teach each other the lesson again after the teacher has left the room, and some students have even been known to go home, gather young children around them and teach them English using TPR. Without doubt, the students who start their course with TPR are more motivated than those who start with grammar and reading comprehension, and there is considerable informal evidence (over 3,000 observations, for example) to suggest that those who start with TPR have a much better chance of developing communicative competence in the language skills than those who do not.
'Good friends' passages

Despite the success of TPR, many administrators are unhappy about not giving the students reading practice from the start. (The development of reading skills is the main stated objective of the curriculum.) In order not to risk further antagonism and to give the students a positive start to their experience of reading in English, we introduce the students to purposeful reading after about 20 hours of TPR, using 'good friends' passages.

In National Workshops and on in-service courses, we drew up a list of about 400 good friends, defined here as words in English similar in form and meaning to equivalent words in Bahasa Indonesia. Examples with high frequency and/or wide coverage are taxi/hotel/bus/photo/police/class. We then classified the words into such categories as travel, sport, entertainment, education, and made use of our lists to devise stories in which at least 50 per cent of the content words are good friends. The idea, of course, is that the students recognize the good friends as familiar and they help to make the rest of the text accessible. This has meant that the students have been able to understand quite long semi-authentic texts from an early stage and thus gain vital exposure to comprehensible language in use as well as an early sense of achievement and an affinity with English.

TPR plus

Throughout the six years of secondary school PKG, teachers use integrated skills units which begin with a TPR phase and then go on to involve a number of communication skills. Thus the teacher might get the whole class to mime a story by giving instructions and using visual aids and then get the students in groups to act the story again adding dialogue in English. Finally, the students in pairs might write a narrative version of the story adding an ending of their own. Alternatively, the students might follow instructions for aerobics activities, then devise activities of their own, get other students to follow the instructions, and then write up those instructions, with illustrations, for an aerobics manual.

Reading skills

From the end of the initial TPR phase onwards, the teachers spend at least one period a week developing reading skills through a combination of advice, purposeful reading activities, and reflection on the reading activities (e.g., 'Why did you not manage to find the information in the time I gave you? What did you do first? How could you have found his age more quickly?'). The skills focused on are skimming, scanning, deduction of meaning from context, visualization, reading between the lines, evaluative reading, intensive reading, and extensive reading.

'Semi-authentic' passages from reading skills booklets specially written by the instructors are made use of at first and then passages from textbooks and authentic passages from newspapers, magazines, brochures, etc. are used as the basis of reading-skills practice and teaching. In addition, in some schools, students find their own texts on topics related to those suggested in the curriculum.

The usual format for a PKG reading lesson involves procedures (e.g., pre-, while, and post-reading activities) which are fairly standard in many countries now. But in Indonesia these procedures are controversial.
Some Indonesian experts believe that the students have already developed reading skills in Indonesian and that these skills will automatically be transferred to reading in English if the students are taught the language properly. They advocate an approach to reading which starts with selecting a passage whose contents and grammatical structures are already known to the students and then pre-teaching all the 'new' words through translation. The students are then supposed to read the passage carefully and answer comprehension questions on it.

**Structure**

We have been experimenting with a student active discovery approach which has become known as EGRA, where the letters stand for Exposure, Generalization, Reinforcement, and Application.

For example the students might be asked to:

1. read a story which includes a number of instances of the simple past and the present perfect (exposure);
2. a. discuss global questions about the story;
   b. use examples given by the teacher to help them identify all the instances of the simple past and the present perfect in the story;
   c. answer concept questions focusing on the differences in function between the two tenses;
   d. make generalizations about the difference in function between the two tenses (generalization);
3. check their generalizations against pairs of sentences provided by the teacher (reinforcement);
4. use their generalizations to help them to rewrite stories they had written the week before (application).

One of the assumptions behind this approach is that if the students are exposed to English in use through reading and through the teacher using English as the medium of instruction, then they will eventually acquire formal and functional communicative competence in the main structures of the curriculum. The other is that focusing their conscious attention on aspects of structure which are problematic to them can contribute to the development of their communicative competence, providing they do so through discovery activities which actively involve them in analysis and application rather than through receiving information passively from a textbook or teacher. In these EGRA lessons the teacher uses English throughout, so that even if the students do not significantly develop their understanding of the highlighted structure they can at least benefit from exposure to meaningful English in use. However, the students use Bahasa Indonesia in their discussions and in their generalizations to facilitate their analysis and the formulation of their conclusions.

**Communication activities**

Most PKG teachers allocate one lesson a week to communication activities. These activities are usually text-based integrated skills activities which involve the students in using the skills and language taught in other lessons. The activities include problem-solving, games, mime narratives,
role play, simulations, scenarios, drama, peer teaching, and mini-projects. Each lesson has an exposure stage in which the students read or listen to something in English, a discussion stage in which the students talk about the task(s) (in Indonesian in the lower classes and in a mixture of Indonesian and English in the higher classes), and a conclusion stage in which groups of students complete the task and then present their ‘outcome’ in English. For example, each group turns the story they have read into a scene from a play and then performs it to another group.

Some experts and administrators are unhappy about these communication activities as they do not teach any one specific item from the curriculum. However, the instructors and most teachers are convinced of the motivational value of these activities and of their effectiveness in helping the students to achieve the objectives of the curriculum.

**Vocabulary**

It is assumed that the students will acquire and learn vocabulary in all English lessons if they are exposed to English in use. But sometimes PKG teachers give a vocabulary lesson focusing on related groups of lexical items found by the teacher to be problematic in previous lessons, or predicted to be problematic in subsequent lessons.

**Materials used by PKG teachers**

The PKG teachers try to make use of the official textbook and other officially approved books wherever possible. A lot of the material they use, however, has been written by the Instructors at National Workshops; during their in/on-service courses; or on specialist materials-writing courses held in the UK. Having to write a lot of the materials themselves certainly helps the teachers to assimilate the principles and techniques they are introduced to on their courses and, further, it gives them an investment in the courses they teach. But it also adds to the demands on their time and increases the difficulty of their job. Many of them teach full timetables in a state school and in a private school. The workload means they often try out new approaches with inadequate materials.

**Managing the changes**

The PKG English Programme has been remarkably successful in getting the teachers on its courses to question their standard practice and to develop new approaches to teaching English. This has been achieved by first of all helping them to develop their own confidence and skills as users of English, and then by inviting them to compare the methodology which helped them with the methodology which they use with their students. Then they are helped to develop their understanding of the new methodology further by evaluating lessons and materials, by devising their own lessons and materials, by peer-teaching their lessons and materials, and by trialling their revised materials and lessons with their classes in their schools. All this is done using English as the medium, often at first reluctantly and with difficulty, but eventually with confidence and fluency. At the end of their course the teachers are left to make their own decisions about what methodology and materials they will use with their classes, but are encouraged to form regional groups to discuss problems and to exchange experiences, materials, and ideas.

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A partial success

We have undoubtedly been successful in effecting some change, but we have unfortunately not been as successful in the management of that change. What we have done is to create a large group of teachers who are committed to the PKG approach they have helped to develop and a small group of headmasters, supervisors, and administrators who have had positive contacts with the programme and are enthusiastic about what we are doing.

However, there is still a large group of administrators who do not understand the principles and objectives of the PKG approach. They are frightened that we will cause students to perform badly in the multiple-choice, discrete-item-orientated school leaving examinations, and that we will encourage them to deviate from the norms of a school culture which has been based on conformity, obedience, and passive reception of ideas and information from the teacher.

Many of these administrators also feel that the PKG approach encourages deviation from the official curriculum and could lead to a situation in which overuse of English and the western values associated with the language and the communicative way we are teaching it could become socially pollutive. This is a view shared by many of the academics who were influential in devising the curriculum, in writing the official textbooks, and in setting the pattern for the public examinations of English. In short, we have been successful with the teachers and with the students: but we have many critics whose labelling of the programme as radical, subversive, and even neo-colonial has led to an official insistence that PKG English sticks more closely to the official curriculum, putting in jeopardy the most successful and least conventional components of the approach.

Current needs

What is needed now is:

1. a publicity and public relations exercise aiming to educate the public in the objectives and principles of the PKG approach;
2. a paper explaining to administrators and academics how the PKG approach attempts to achieve the stated objectives of the curriculum;
3. an objective evaluation of the pedagogic value of the PKG approach by a team of national and international experts with no previous involvement in the project;
4. an open and thorough discussion of the pedagogic and socio-political issues which trouble the outspoken critics of PKG English;
5. an explicit Government statement about the future role of English, to act as a guideline for curriculum developers, examination setters, material writers, administrators, teacher trainers, and teachers.

Impressions of the value of the PKG English Programme

It is really too early to do a thorough evaluation of the impact of PKG English on the learning of English but, because of the controversy surrounding the PKG approach, an interim classroom-based evaluation will be made by an invited expert in 1989. However, we are in a position to make generalizations based on the impressions of the fourteen international consultants who have so far observed PKG lessons in the
The following impressions are shared by most international consultants and instructors.

1 The use of English as the medium on in/on-service courses and in the classroom has been a success. Many teachers have developed great confidence and fluency, most teachers have managed to communicate easily and effectively (although inevitably without total accuracy), and only a handful of teachers out of over 5,000 have failed to use English effectively as the medium. This has had a great impact on the students, who have gained great satisfaction and motivation from realizing that they can understand English after all, and who have been given far greater exposure to English used for communication than those students in classes not taught by PKG teachers.

2 Most PKG teachers have been very successful in establishing a positive, supportive rapport with the students despite the large classes (48 students per class) and the tradition of authoritarian teaching.

3 Many teachers have made very positive use of their personalities in their teaching and have managed to stimulate a personal response from the students.

4 Students in PKG classes are in general more motivated to learn English than those in non-PKG classes. They are also more confident and more fluent and on average get the same or slightly higher marks on standard discrete-item tests than students in non-PKG classes. This last impression was borne out by an experiment in seven provinces which compared the progress made in one semester by PKG and non-PKG students on the same communicative and non-communicative tests. The average improvement for PKG students on the communicative tests was nine percent greater than that for non-PKG students and the improvement on the discrete-item tests was about the same in some provinces and slightly higher for the PKG students in others.

5 Students in non-PKG classes often ask their teacher to teach in the PKG way or request a transfer to a PKG class.

6 TPR has been a success and has led to dramatic gains in the confidence, comprehension, fluency, and comprehensibility of pronunciation of beginners with PKG teachers in comparison to non-PKG beginners.

7 Communication activities are popular with students and teachers and seem to have made a significant contribution to the development of motivation, confidence, and communication skills. Most teachers have managed to use group and pair work effectively, despite the warnings of some experts that they were unsuitable for Indonesian schools. Some teachers though use group work indiscriminately and waste a lot of time getting groups to discuss very simple questions.

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Reading skills lessons have helped PKG students to become more effective readers than non-PKG students, but not as much has been achieved as was hoped. This seems to be mainly because many teachers do not yet have the understanding and confidence to guide the students in their reading strategies and because weaknesses in class management often mean that students do not actually use the target skill(s) in the reading activities. For example, students are given far too long for a scanning activity and therefore do not scan at all; or students use dictionaries during a ‘deduction of meaning from context’ activity; or one bright student gives the answer to a ‘reading between the lines’ question before most other students have had time to think.

In addition, the teachers have had great problems finding texts which conform to curriculum topics, which appeal to the students, and which are useful for developing the target skills. Also there are hardly any opportunities for students to read English outside the classroom, although some teachers have got the students to develop their own class libraries and some set homework tasks which require the students to read whatever English is available in their environment.

Most teachers have managed to make most of their lessons more student-centred and student-active. However, for some the pendulum has swung too far and their lessons are often filled with time-consuming pseudo-activities. Examples would be of students going out to the front to write their answers to questions on the board; of all twelve groups being asked for their solution to the same problem; of students being forced to justify answers which everybody knows are correct. Some of these teachers have given up direct teaching altogether and miss many opportunities for providing useful feedback (e.g., when most students have got a question wrong because of misunderstanding a structure or a lexical item).

The structure lessons have not yet been very successful. This seems to be because the teachers are so conditioned to focus on syntax and form and have such little awareness themselves of the functions of the structures on the curriculum that they still give very teacher-centred, informational lessons: alternatively, they leave the students in totally student-centred confusion without any teacher guidance towards functional discoveries. We are hoping to tackle this problem by running more language-awareness sessions for instructors and for teachers, and by producing more structure materials for the teachers to use.

Some teachers are still using very dull, very easy materials to make sure that they are ‘fair’ to all the students, and to make sure that very few mistakes are made. We are gradually getting across to the teachers the concept that a good lesson is one in which constructive confusion leads to learning rather than one in which the students do everything with ease. But such a radical change of attitude will obviously take time.

After completing one cycle of PKG in/on-service some teachers feel isolated among their non-PKG colleagues and overwhelmed by the unsupported demands of lesson preparation. Some seek help from ex-PKG teachers in other schools (in some areas informal support groups
have been formed), but some regress to teaching in their previous
teacher-centred, textbook-dominated way. It is hoped that the setting-up
of a PKG Newsletter, the formation of area groups of ex-PKG teachers,
and the distribution of booklets of new PKG materials will help to over-
come this problem.

13 Without doubt, my most overriding impression is that the teachers
and the students are far more capable than they have previously been
given credit for. They can use English effectively if they are given expo-
sure to English, encouragement, and support.

Conclusions

My experience as English Language Advisor to the PKG Project has con-
vinced me that the most important factors are the attitudes and person-
ality of the teacher. The teacher most likely to succeed in helping the
students to develop communicative competence is the one who is very
enthusiastic about teaching English, who believes in whatever method he
or she is using, who gains the trust and respect of the students, whose
lessons are interesting, and who creates a positive, creative rapport with
the students.

In that sense, actual methodology used does not seem to be a crucial fac-
tor in achieving successful language learning, providing that it facilitates
rapport between students and teacher; that it helps the teacher to create
positive attitudes towards the language lesson; that it involves the stu-
dents actively in the process of learning; and that it provides some experi-
ence of the language in use. Throughout the history of foreign language
teaching this seems to have been a formula for success. My experience on
the PKG Project convinces me that it is still true today, regardless of
specific educational systems, needs, objectives, and cultures.

I also believe that a locally appropriate version of the communicative
approach seems to be the most effective methodology for developing
communicative competence; not necessarily because it is based on the
most valid theories of language acquisition, but because it gives the
teacher the freedom and opportunity to develop the classroom ethos
most conducive to successful secondary school learning of a foreign
language.

Of course, there might be a price to pay. The optimum classroom culture
for foreign language learning might be at odds with the culture of the
school and the culture of the society. This could lead to a conflict of values
and objectives—an unhappy possibility which must be taken into account
by language planners setting objectives for foreign language learning in
national systems of education.

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