

Submission – Inquiry into Australia’s relations with Indonesia

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I preface my individual submission to the inquiry by stating that I am an Australian citizen and have been involved in the study and teaching of the Indonesian language for over thirty years. I began my study of Indonesian at the University of Sydney in 1970, studied in Indonesia for twelve months in 1973, began teaching Indonesian in 1975 and have been actively involved in the teaching of Indonesian to both secondary students and adults for over twenty-five years. In my current position as Indonesian Consultant K–12 with the NSW Department of Education & Training I work closely with teachers and schools. I have returned to Indonesia many times, for study, travel and in connection with my work. I have many Indonesian friends in Indonesia and within the Indonesian community in Australia.

The focus of my submission will concentrate on the social and cultural aspects of the bi-lateral relationship, with particular reference to the teaching and learning of Indonesian in Australian schools.

The study of an Asian language, given Australia’s position in the Asia-Pacific region, is crucial, and the case for Indonesian is even more compelling. Increasingly, for our prosperity, welfare, environment and security, we need to work with our neighbours to forge alliances and agreements, to minimise conflict and poverty, restore ecosystems and evolve an agenda of ethics and fairness to which all can be a part. Language study is an essential part of the school curriculum and must continue to remain so. In an ever more competitive world, it is essential that Australians are not lacking in areas of education which are increasingly valued by the global community. The pivotal importance of Australian students learning about the countries, cultures and languages of their regional neighbours is becoming more important in the current global context.

Knowledge of a second language is an integral element in fostering cultural understanding and our ability to engage internationally. The ability to communicate in Indonesian enhances the positive features of our culturally diverse society and helps to reinforce the ideals of mutual respect. It also promotes understanding, harmony and cooperation between Australia and Indonesia. The tragic events of the bombing of the Sari Club in Bali on 12

October 2002 highlight Australia's need to expand our strategic ties in Indonesia and increase our teaching about Indonesia.

The study of Asian languages in general, and Indonesian in particular, must continue to be a priority for Australia. The federal government should immediately reverse the decision to cease National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) funding at the end of this year. It is crucial that the federal government takes a leadership role in ensuring that these programs remain a priority in Australian schools. By relinquishing this leadership role, state governments, schools, parents and students will not view Indonesian, other Asian languages or the studies of Asia as being important. In the national interest, it is imperative that these programs receive special and separate funding. Without this, the sustainability of the initiatives achieved to date will be severely threatened.

The position of Indonesian in NSW has been significantly enhanced since the commencement of the NALSAS strategy. NALSAS funding has benefited Indonesian programs in a variety of ways, including a significant increase in the number of schools teaching Indonesian language programs, the provision of high quality resources, the availability of increased professional development opportunities for teachers and the provision of expert consultancy for Indonesian teachers.

The number of schools offering Indonesian programs has increased, particularly small schools and schools in isolated areas. This funding has provided essential resources (including human resources) that would normally have been unavailable. The funding has also been used to provide students with a pathway to continue their study of Indonesian from kindergarten to Year 12 through the funding of continuity programs in school clusters. Many students have also received assistance to participate in study tours to Indonesia.

Currently in NSW over 300 government schools offer Indonesian language programs, as well as a significant number of schools in the Catholic and independent sectors. Without NALSAS funding many schools will not be able to retain these programs.

Given that Australia is one of the few countries in the world where Indonesian is taught as a second language, some external funding is necessary to make the publication of new resources viable. NALSAS funding has been instrumental in enabling the development of innovative resource materials, including online resources and CD-ROMs. Curriculum materials developed by the NSW Department of Education & Training to support the implementation of Indonesian syllabuses and language programs K-12 in schools include print, audio, online and multimedia resources for students and teachers. In particular, teachers and students in rural and regional areas have welcomed the availability of these resources.

On a national level NALSAS funding has enabled the creation of the *Hebat!* CD-ROM for learners of Indonesian in primary school, as well as several award winning

multimedia resources viz the *Go Indonesia* web site for primary students and the *Voices and Visions: Indonesia* CD-ROM, designed to provide Indonesian perspectives for senior secondary students across a range of curriculum areas.

Funding has helped increase the quality of Indonesian teaching and Indonesian programs in NSW schools. Teachers have been able to further develop their language skills and understanding of second language acquisition by attending professional development workshops and seminars that they would otherwise have been unable to attend. Teachers have also received grants to complete study in areas such as Indonesian language, LOTE methodology and Asian Studies, as well as scholarships to participate in in-country language acquisition and proficiency upgrading programs. The funding also enabled the development of geographical and online networks so that teachers can share experiences and promote curriculum change in schools.

In my role as Indonesian consultant K-12 I have developed and presented inservice courses and workshops on issues of Indonesian language teaching. I have facilitated professional development for teachers of Indonesian K-12 on issues such as syllabus implementation, programming and assessment, intercultural issues, upgrading of language proficiency and incorporation of technology into Indonesian teaching programs.

In 2002 over 140 teachers have attended Indonesian language specific professional development activities in Sydney and regional centres across NSW. These courses have been held either after school or on a Saturday, because the current level of funding would not cover relief. Without NALSAS funding the feasibility of providing any professional development for teachers of Indonesian, even on a reduced scale, is problematic.

Current NALSAS funded consultancy support to teachers of Indonesian in NSW includes:

- development of curriculum materials including technology-based resources
- development and presentation of inservice courses and workshops
- provision of advice for curriculum development in Indonesian
- enhancement and maintenance of a web site for Indonesian teachers
- publication of a regular newsletter to inform teachers of issues related to the teaching and learning of Indonesian
- provision of an email discussion group for teachers of Indonesian.

Curtailling this funding will have a devastating impact on the quality of Indonesian language programs, teaching practice, availability of quality teachers, class sizes, student retention rates and the status of language study within the general community. It will also affect Australia's engagement in international arenas as the number of people with Indonesian expertise and socio-cultural understanding will dramatically diminish.

Current Commonwealth funding has just begun to see rewards in shifting Australian perceptions towards the benefit of Indonesian language study and better understanding people from different cultural background as well as recognising the link between expertise in Indonesian and greater opportunity

in the global competitive market. As General Peter Cosgrove asserted "it is impossible to overstate the case for expanding our collective knowledge of the language and customs of our neighbours" and Australia's "future prosperity and security will depend on our ability to understand these cultures and to build bridges to the citizens of these nations."

Furthermore, on 17 October Federal Treasurer Peter Costello said "Australians are enmeshed in the rich tapestry of Asia, as Asia is an increasingly important influence on Australia. Moments of crisis highlight our common destiny. In 1997 it was a financial crisis. Today it is a human tragedy. At these points of crisis we must not withdraw. We must heighten our engagement and our cooperation. We must work together. Australia stands ready to do so."

The Federal Education Minister, Dr Brendan Nelson, has often quoted Thomas Jefferson's words that "education is the first line in the defence of the nation". At a time when we tend to think about physical and military defence, we should consider the idea of social defence and the place that educators hold in it.

It has often been observed that Australia and Indonesia are "strange neighbours" and have little in common. However, we cannot choose our neighbours and we cannot ignore Indonesia's proximity and strategic location. Despite great differences in language, history, culture and economic and political development, our two nations are interdependent and inextricably bound together because of geographical location, economic relations and geo-political history. With patience, effort and mutual understanding, we can ease tensions, overcome differences and create good relations in challenging circumstances. In this context, continued funding for the teaching of Indonesian is a national priority.

It is critical that Indonesian becomes more deeply embedded into the curriculum of Australian educational institutions. To ensure that this objective is achieved steps must be taken to:

- restore significant funding to promote, and indeed expand, the study of Indonesian at all stages of the educational continuum from primary to tertiary level
- increase bi-lateral exchange programs for teachers and students
- increase the opportunities for teachers of Indonesian to participate in in-country language courses to upgrade their proficiency and understanding of Indonesian contemporary issues
- initiate reciprocal visits by key educators/school principals
- develop high-quality curriculum resources that reflect the reality of contemporary Indonesia
- promote more people-to-people cultural exchanges to foster genuine understanding and break down stereotypes.