

## WRITING AND LITERACY IN INDONESIA

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At the end of World War II, when Indonesia declared its independence from the colonial regime of the Netherlands, only one Indonesian in 20 could read and write in any language. As the 21st century begins, almost nine out of every ten Indonesians is literate. This paper examines the sociolinguistic and historical context in which this dramatic increase in literacy has occurred, focusing on the development of written language in present-day Indonesia; the crucial role played by *Bahasa Indonesia*, the national language; and the contributions of both the conventional and the nonformal education systems in promoting literacy.

### Introduction

As recent events on several of its outlying islands have tragically demonstrated, Indonesia is confronting many of the political, economic, and ethnic tensions still encountered by other multilingual, multiethnic Asian nations that have emerged from the colonial era. However, Indonesia differs from most of these other countries in not having its regional conflicts further exacerbated by linguistic tensions, as has occurred, for example, in India, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Rather, *Bahasa Indonesia*, a variety of the Malay language, was proclaimed Indonesia's national language while Indonesia was still a Dutch colony, was named her official language at the time independence was declared, and has never since had serious competition for its status as the sole national and official language (Diah 1982; Nababan 1982, Kuipers 1993).<sup>1</sup>

One major benefit of this widespread acceptance and use of the national language has been a remarkable spread of literacy throughout the Indonesian population. In 1945, when Indonesia declared its independence from the Netherlands, only five per cent of the population could read and write (Napitupulu 1980). Just 35 years later, in 1980, almost 70 per cent of the population aged 15 years or older were literate, a percentage that has now increased to an estimated 87 per cent in 2000 (UNESCO 1999). This paper will examine the sociolinguistic and historical context in which this dramatic increase in literacy has occurred, focusing in particular on Malay/Bahasa Indonesia. Also discussed will be current efforts to maintain and to further extend literacy among Indonesians, both through the expansion of reading and writing skills in the school system and through a very successful program of nonformal education.

## Background

Consisting of an estimated 13,000 to 17,000 islands (Kuipers 1993, Turner 1999), Indonesia extends from east to west a distance equivalent to the length of Europe from Ireland to the Caspian Sea, occupies half of the territory of Southeast Asia, and has the third largest land area in Asia after China and India (Peacock 1973). In 1980, according to the census of that year, Indonesia had a population of 146.7 million (Nababan 1982). The census of 1990 reported a population of 179.3 million (Turner 1999), and by 2000, the United Nations (in Turner 1999) projected a population of 212.6 million, the fourth largest population in the world (Encyclopedia Britannica 1999).

This population, distributed across 6,000 of Indonesia's islands, comprise over 300 distinct ethnic groups, each with its own cultural patterns and linguistic repertoire (Diah 1982). Estimates of the number of regional vernacular languages in current use range from 250 to almost 700, depending on criteria employed to distinguish languages from dialects. Except in the easternmost province of Irian Jaya (the western half of the island of New Guinea), these languages are generally related through the Western Indonesian sub-branch of the Malayo-Polynesian, or Austronesian, language family, but few of them are mutually intelligible (Voegelin & Voegelin 1964, Dyen 1971, Kuipers 1993). The majority of these languages are used in the sparsely populated eastern islands by at most a few thousand speakers each. However, several languages on the more populous islands to the west have many more speakers, including Javanese in Central and East Java, 70 million; Sundanese in West Java, 25 million; Madurese in Madura and East Java, 9 million; Minangkabau in West Sumatra, 7.5 million; Balinese in Bali, 3 million; Bugis/Makassar in South Sulawesi, 2.5 million; Acehnese in the very north of Sumatra, 2.2 million; and Batak in North Central Sumatra, 2 million (estimates in Kuipers 1993). In addition, a significant number of Indonesia's three million Chinese, who reside mainly in the seaports and larger cities, use Hokkien, Hakka, and Cantonese (Nababan 1982, Kuipers 1993).

## Malay to Bahasa Indonesia

The speakers of these diverse regional and ethnic languages, connected since pre-history by inter-island trade, have for almost 2,000 years shared a common lingua franca, Malay. The first institutionalized spread of Malay throughout insular Southeast Asia was by the great seafaring powers of Srivijaya, Malacca, and Aceh, which dominated trade in the region from early in the Christian era until the sixteenth century (Gonda 1973, Abas 1978, Asmah 1982). During the Netherlands' colonization of present-day Indonesia (1600-1942), although Dutch was initially the only official language of the colony, the Dutch found Malay extremely useful as an auxiliary language for communication with the linguistically diverse peoples whom they sought to govern. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Malay 'was solidly in place inside officialdom' (Anderson 1983:121), and in 1865, Malay was adopted by the Dutch colonial government as the second official language for local administration and commerce (Hoffman 1973). As an ethnically neutral indigenous language, Malay also became the lan-

guage of opposition to the Dutch colonial regime, culminating in its adoption by nationalists in 1928 as Bahasa Indonesia, 'the Indonesian Language'. The Japanese occupied Indonesia from 1942 to 1945 and used Bahasa Indonesia as an official language of their regime for law, administration, education, science, and industry. Hence, when Indonesia proclaimed its independence in 1945, Bahasa Indonesia had become the primary pan-Indonesian language and, with virtually no opposition, was declared Indonesia's single national and official language (Alisjahbana 1976, Abas 1978, Asmah 1982, Diah 1982).

Under Indonesia's current language policy, Bahasa Indonesia remains the only national and official language. It is the symbol of national identity and unity, the language of law and government administration, the medium of instruction in education, and a tool for national planning and for the development of science, technology, and national culture. In complementary distribution with Bahasa Indonesia, regional languages often serve as the medium of instruction for the first two or three years of elementary education, and are also maintained for intra-regional communication and for the preservation and development of local culture (Nababan 1979, 1982, Diah 1982).

### The written tradition

The first evidence of writing in the Indonesian archipelago consists of 5th century A.D. stone engravings in Sanskrit, the language brought by Hindu priests from India in the early centuries of the Christian era. Soon afterward, writing systems based on Devanagari and other Indian scripts began to appear in Malay and the regional languages used on Java, Bali, Sumatra, and present-day Sulawesi. The development of these scripts led to the first indigenous literatures, the *Royal Chronicles*, written in the Hindu courts of Java and Sumatra (Gonda 1973, Alisjahbana 1976, Nababan 1979, Asmah 1982). Kawi, the writing system of Old Javanese (900 to 1500 A.D.) based on the Devanagari script, is used in the earliest written inscription in an indigenous language in Southeast Asia, the *Charter of Sukabumi* in Central Java, executed in 804 A.D. (Zoetmulder 1974). Kawi was also the most extensively used written language in Southeast Asia during this period in terms of number and variety of texts, including prose stories, and sung poetry; scientific, legal, and philosophical treatises; chants, songs, and folklore; and epic literature, particularly the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, imported from India but nativized to Javanese content and forms. The *Kakawin Ramayana* is oldest extant document of Kawi literature, dating from before 930 A.D. (Zurbuchen 1976).

With the large-scale conversion of the Indonesian islands to Islam between the 13th and 17th centuries, Arabic writing developed into the *Jawi* and *Pegon* scripts for Malay and Javanese, respectively. These scripts were used for both religious and secular matters, including the translation of Arabic literature and the composing of original literature in Malay and Javanese (Jones 1981, Asmah 1982).

The institutionalized romanization of Indonesian languages came with the adoption by the Dutch colonial government of Malay as a second official language, as mentioned above. In 1901, the Dutch scholar C. A. van Ophuijsen published a standardized Latin-alphabet spelling system for Malay, along with an extensive wordlist implementing this system. In 1920, the colonial government established a literature bureau, the *Balai Pustaka*, to provide popular reading material in Malay and several regional languages for Indonesians who were literate in the new spelling system (Vandenbosch 1944, Hoffman 1973).

Concurrently, a native journalistic press in Malay began to flourish after 1900; by 1925, approximately 200 newspapers had been published for varying periods wholly or in part in Malay. In addition, the *Budi Utomo* ('High Endeavor'), a nationalist movement established in 1908 by a community of Javanese intellectuals to promote Javanese language and culture, adopted Malay as its official written language (Anwar 1985). During the 1930s, the first major non-European promotion of written literature in Malay, by now renamed Bahasa Indonesia, was undertaken by the *Pujangga Baru* ('The New Poets'), who commenced publication of a literary magazine by the same name in order to 'promote the Indonesian language and its culture' (Alisjahbana 1974:399). The efforts of Pujangga Baru and similar writers' groups during the 1930s produced genres of nationalistic writing which became the foundation for several schools of modern literature in Bahasa Indonesia, and which are used in secondary schools as models for expository writing (Anderson 1966, Alisjahbana 1976, Diah 1982).

In 1938, the leadership of Pujangga Baru organized the First Indonesian Language Congress in Surakarta, Java, where it was agreed that urgent needs for the spread of the language included an institute and faculty for teaching Bahasa Indonesia, a modernized and standardized lexicon and grammar, and unified reform of the many spelling systems that had developed alongside the one formulated by van Ophuijsen, mentioned above (Effendi 1972, Nur 1979, Anwar 1985).

Not surprisingly, the Dutch ultimately gave little support to these Indonesian nationalist writers. However, the next colonizer, the Japanese, implemented most of the recommendations of the Congress of 1938. During their occupation of Indonesia (1942-1945), the Japanese abolished Dutch as the principal language of power in the East Indies, hoping eventually to replace it with Japanese, which was taught as a compulsory subject in all the schools (Reid & Oki 1986). With regard to literacy in Japanese, Anwar (1985:37) reports that for most Indonesians, 'the *katakana* and *hiragana* alphabets were learned and mastered after a week or two.' However, the urgent wartime need to communicate quickly and clearly with the Indonesian people forced the Japanese to give Bahasa Indonesia official status almost immediately and to use it as the primary language of the archipelago (Reid 1980).

In so doing, the Japanese contributed greatly to the development and spread of Bahasa Indonesia as a written language in the domains of government and law; of science, technology, and industry; and of elementary through university education, including the publication of textbooks. In order to spread propa-

ganda for their war effort, the occupation government used Bahasa Indonesia for written communication with the Indonesian people and also supported increases in the number and circulation of newspapers in Bahasa Indonesia (Elsbree 1953, Alisjahbana 1976). 'It was a period in which a great deal that had never before been written or otherwise expressed in Indonesian had to be communicated in the language' (Anwar 1985:46).

In addition, in 1942, in order to cultivate Bahasa Indonesia so that it could be used 'to express modern ideas as well as technical terms' (Anwar 1985:43), the Japanese organized the first systematic planning of Bahasa Indonesia by establishing a Commission of the Indonesian Language, comprised of both Japanese and prominent Indonesians, including future president Sukarno. The tasks of this commission were to write a normative grammar, to standardize the vocabulary of daily usage, and to develop terminology.

These efforts have been continued by an unbroken succession of such commissions and agencies from independence to the present day. Since 1960, these Indonesian agencies have met regularly with language planners from Malaysia to standardize the Malay language in the two countries. One achievement of these efforts has been a unified Latin-alphabet *Melindo* spelling system, adopted by both countries in 1972 (Asmah 1982, Noss 1984). The Latin alphabet has also been applied to create standard writing systems for several of the major regional languages, including Javanese (Abas 1978, Perez, Santiago, & Liem 1978).

## Literacy

Despite this long tradition of writing, literacy in Indonesia has until recently been accessible only to the elite. Under the Hindu kingdoms, reading and writing were limited to the court nobility, whose children were instructed in holy writings by special gurus living in remote areas (Soedijarto, et al. 1980). With the advent of Islam, members of the aristocratic social strata began to learn the Arabic alphabet in centers for Islamic study called *pesantren*, which still flourish today. However, of those who studied in the *pesantren*, only children of the rising bourgeoisie — traders and more affluent land owners — tended to become sufficiently literate in Arabic writing to use the Jawi and Pegon scripts, mentioned above (Jones 1981, Naipaul 1981).

During the latter part of the colonial period, the Dutch government provided Dutch-language education at the primary, secondary, and ultimately university levels for the children of the Eurasian and Indonesian urban elite. Concurrently, as the direct involvement of the Dutch in the governing of its East Indies increased, the colonial government needed more educated personnel to serve 'as low-level clerks, bookkeepers, and assistants to Dutch officials in government and business' (Gonzalez & Prijono 1988:592).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in 1867 a colonial department of education was created, and a limited number of elementary schools with Malay as the primary medium of instruction were established for the non-elite (Vandenbosch 1944, Wilson 1975, Nababan 1979, Gonzalez & Prijono 1988).<sup>3</sup>

However, this education was far from universal. In 1900, there were a total of only 1500 schools in the Dutch East Indies, or one school for every 24,000 inhabitants. Thus, by the end of the colonial era, most Indonesians were still illiterate. In the 1930 census, the last official census prior to World War II, only 6.4 per cent of the non-European and non-Eurasian population (10.8 per cent of the males and 2.2 per cent of the females) were literate in any language, with literacy defined as the ability 'to write a note to an acquaintance on an ordinary subject, no matter in which language or with which characters' (Jones 1976:40).

After capturing Indonesia in 1942, the Japanese attempted to provide Malay-medium schooling and literacy instruction throughout the islands. However, they experienced little more success in increasing literacy than had the Dutch (Thomas 1970), and when Indonesia proclaimed its independence in 1945, no more than five per cent of the population were literate in the Latin alphabet (Napitupulu 1980).

Since independence, several nationwide programs have been undertaken to spread literacy (Soedijarto, et al. 1980). In most of these plans, the major vehicle has been the educational system, particularly at the elementary level, where basic instruction in literacy skills occurs. Though the national curriculum does not assign a specific period of class time for the teaching of reading and writing, these skills are usually taught from the first grade during the eight hours per week allotted to language instruction throughout primary school (Nababan 1983). In the cities and other areas where Bahasa Indonesia is widely spoken in the community, beginning classes in reading are generally taught in Bahasa Indonesia, using materials developed and distributed by the national Department of Education and Culture. In other regions where the regional vernacular functions as the medium of instruction for the first two to three years of school, literacy skills are initially taught in the vernacular before switching to Bahasa Indonesia. Preparation of reading materials in local languages is, however, left entirely to the provincial and local school authorities. On the more populated islands, Latin-alphabet literacy materials have been produced in at least twelve regional languages. However, such materials are not universally available, and in many primary schools where a vernacular is the medium of instruction, basic reading and writing are taught in Bahasa Indonesia (Nababan 1982, 1983).

The impact of this in-school instruction in literacy skills has been reflected in increasing literacy rates among the population in direct proportion to rising primary school enrollments since independence. In 1945, when the Japanese withdrew from Indonesia, only 20.7 per cent of all elementary school age (7-12 years) Indonesians were enrolled in school. By 1980, this percentage had increased dramatically to 85 per cent (Diah 1982), and by 1982, there was 'virtually 100 per cent enrollment for the relative age group in the first grade' (Gonzalez & Prijono 1988:592). Between 1971 and 1989, elementary school enrollment more than doubled (Moegiadi & Jiyono 1994).

Concurrently, whereas in 1951, still fewer than nine per cent of the population could read and write in any language (Thomas 1977), this percentage had

increased to 39 per cent in 1961, to 56.6 per cent in 1971, to 69.3 per cent in 1980, and to 83.7 per cent in 1990, according to census data gathered in those years (UNESCO 1974, 1977, 1999; Nababan 1983). Literates in the 1971 census (and presumably in subsequent censuses as well) were people aged fifteen years or higher 'who could both read and write simple sentences in any kind of letter or character' (Jones 1976:42). UNESCO (1999) estimates that in the year 2000, literacy among this age range of the population had increased to 87 per cent.

### Nonformal literacy programs

Despite the large numbers of children currently attending elementary schools, only 50 per cent of the pupils who enter the first grade reach the fourth grade, and only 35 per cent complete all six years (Diah 1982, Gonzalez & Prijono 1988). A major reason for this high rate of attrition is the expense of education. Although tuition fees have been officially abolished in all primary schools since 1978, other fees, including school maintenance, building levees, and the purchase of uniforms, impose a significant financial burden on most families. In addition, many rural children must leave school in order to help their families earn a livelihood (Beeby 1979, Gonzalez & Prijono 1988). With regard to the current non-school-age population, among Indonesians aged 25 years and older, as recently as 1990, 54.5 per cent had never attended school (UNESCO 1999). Since a 'rudimentary' level of literacy is not achieved until the completion of 3.5 years of schooling (Pearse 1979), many Indonesians do not stay in school long enough to learn to read and write effectively. In addition, literacy rates are lower among women and residents of rural areas — sectors of the population which still have least long-term access to the school system. For example, according to the 1971 census (UNESCO 1977), among Indonesians aged 15 years and older, 76.7 per cent of the urban population were literate (87.6 per cent of males, 66.1 per cent of females); however, among the rural population, who still comprise 80 per cent of all Indonesians, only 52.2 per cent were literate (65.5 per cent of males, 40.1 per cent of females). By 1990, whereas among the total Indonesian population, 89.6 per cent of males aged 15 years or older were literate, only 75.3 per cent of females were (United Nations 1999).

For those Indonesians who have not acquired literacy through the conventional school system, the national Department of Education and Culture has, since 1951, provided a succession of literacy projects as part of a larger on-going program in nonformal education, that is, 'organized learning opportunities outside the regular school room' (Soedijarto, et al. 1980:50). The major current nonformal literacy program — initiated at the direction of then-President Suharto in 1978 and assisted by UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank — is targeted for Indonesians 7 to 44 years old who have never had educational opportunities or are school dropouts (Napitupulu 1980, UNESCO 1982, Moegadi & Jiyono 1994). The program is organized under the name *KEJAR* (an acronym from *kelompok belajar*, meaning 'learning group'). With the slogan 'each one teach ten', these learning groups consist of an average of 10 people from a village instructed by one literate person from the same village who acts as their 'tutor'. Most of the tu-

tors have graduated from primary school and some have completed junior high school; as members of the community, the tutors are often perceived as less threatening than the standard classroom teacher, who has usually come from outside the village (Gonzalez & Prijono 1988). The members of each group determine where and when classes will be held, generally meeting three or four times weekly during evening hours in the members' homes. Administration and evaluation of the program and the distribution of teaching materials occur through a chain of command from the national down through the village level, where 'monitors', usually primary school teachers or secondary school graduates, each supervise five to ten learning groups and their tutors (Napitupulu 1980, Gonzalez & Prijono 1988).

The objectives of the KEJAR program are 'functional literacy' — literacy in the Latin alphabet and proficiency in Bahasa Indonesia sufficient for writing letters and for reading newspapers, magazines, and other publications on various practical topics; numeracy in Arabic numerals for such tasks as measuring land areas and calculating loan interest; and the acquisition of basic education and critical thinking skills. In addition, the program seeks to foster a sense of national identity, and to develop attitudes supportive of social change and economic growth (Napitupulu 1980, Nababan 1983, Gonzalez & Prijono 1988, Moegiadi & Jiyono 1994).

Toward these objectives, since the early 1980s, *Package A*, a series of 100 24- to 40-page pamphlets, has been produced by the national Directorate of Community Education as a core curriculum for instruction nationwide. The first 20 pamphlets, designed for use with a tutor in the learning groups, increase sequentially in complexity of syntactic structures, text types, and arithmetic tasks. The first three of these, pamphlets A1 through A3, introduce the Latin alphabet and Arabic numerals using 'structural, analytic, and synthetic (SAS) methods' (UNESCO 1981:50), in which a simple phrase or sentence in Bahasa Indonesia is presented describing an illustration (such as 'father's green trousers'); this phrase or sentence is analyzed into words, the words into syllables, and the syllables into graphemes; and then these constituents are resynthesized into the original phrase or sentence. Students repeat the tutor's pronunciation as they read, after which the tutor explains the phrase or sentence in the local vernacular. Also provided, for each page of text in these initial three pamphlets, is a sheet of tracing paper which students can use to develop their skills in printing and in writing numerals (Department of Education and Culture 1979, 1981; Nababan 1983).

Pamphlets A4 through A10 contain more advanced integrated lessons in reading and writing Bahasa Indonesia and in arithmetic without the SAS methods or the tracing paper. Pamphlets A11 through A20 provide follow-up materials for literacy and arithmetic practice and for studying Bahasa Indonesia in greater depth. Each of these pamphlets focuses on a particular activity of immediate utility to most rural families, on such topics as 'Home Garden' and 'Let's Save'.

Whereas the first 20 pamphlets all require the assistance of a tutor in the learning groups, the remaining 80 pamphlets, divided into two levels of difficulty,

serve as a self-study 'popular library' for students who have attained basic literacy in the learning groups through the first 20 pamphlets. These more advanced pamphlets cover a wide range of topics, from such practical household skills as 'Food Conservation', and 'Raising Rabbits', to more abstract subjects, such as 'Indonesia, My Homeland', 'United We Stand, Divided We Fall', 'Indonesia, A Constitutional State', and 'Religions and Faith in Indonesia' (Department of Education and Culture 1979, Napitupulu 1980, UNESCO 1981).

Most of these materials are printed in and then distributed from Jakarta. However, in order to promote the program's relevance to local contexts, supplementary readings are produced in each region, usually by hand or mimeograph, but in some provinces with 'micro-mobile printing units,' which include dark-rooms and offset printing equipment (Gonzalez & Prijono 1988).

To date, the impact of the KEJAR program on literacy rates among its target population remains unknown. Similarly, no large-scale evaluation of the program's implementation has been completed. However, the fact that the program is flourishing and expanding more than twenty years after its inception probably indicates some measure of success. Meanwhile, since the 1994-95 school year, compulsory basic education in the schools has been increased from six to nine years, an extension also being adopted in the nonformal sector. The original *Package A*, intended to present a rough equivalent of the national elementary school curriculum, is now being supplemented by a more advanced level *Package B*, which is designed to approximate the junior secondary school curriculum for learners who have completed *Package A* or have dropped out of junior high school (Moegiadi & Jiyono 1994).

### Expansion of literacy skills

Mandatory instruction in Bahasa Indonesia continues throughout primary and secondary schooling. However, the rate of advancement in literacy development beyond the basic level is constrained by several factors. One of these is the exceedingly high dropout rate, mentioned earlier. In addition, of those students who stay in school, 15 to 20 per cent are repeating their previous grade (Gonzalez & Prijono 1988). These problems are compounded by a critical shortage of textbooks, especially in light of Indonesia's rapid population growth. Surveys conducted in the 1970s revealed that in the less-developed provinces, an average of 40 per cent of the sixth graders had no textbooks; in elementary schools in some towns and small cities, no students questioned had any books (Beeby 1979). To alleviate this shortage, between 1977 and 1994, the central government produced over 900 million copies of textbooks for use in primary and secondary schools around the country (Gonzalez & Prijono 1988). However, increased production is only a partial solution. The great distances and the shortage of transportation facilities between islands greatly impede the distribution of materials, which can take several months to reach remote areas (Moegiadi & Jiyono 1994).

Outside of the school system, there is a similar shortage of reading materials, particularly in rural areas, where many people who have gained literacy skills in

the beginning grades of elementary school or through the nonformal education program relapse into illiteracy (Moegiadi & Jiyono 1994). Apparently, little has changed since Nababan observed (1983:43) that 'the reading habit is still in a developmental stage in Indonesia'. Book publication, other than textbooks, in all languages is low due to limited financial resources among both publishers and potential consumers. To generate more interest in the writing, publication, and reading of books, the government has established a National Council for Book Development, which has among its projects a 'Books Enter Villages' program and the establishment of local libraries (Diah 1982, UNESCO 1984).

Similar shortages occur with the print mass media. In 1996, the combined circulation of Indonesia's 69 daily newspapers, most of which are written in Bahasa Indonesia, was 4,665,000, and the combined circulation of the nation's 94 non-daily newspapers was 4,696,000 (UNESCO 1999). This total circulation of under ten million is well below a minimum of one copy per ten inhabitants recommended by UNESCO (1961). Since these media are important to the government's needs to disseminate information to Indonesia's overwhelmingly rural population, the national government has implemented a 'Newspapers Enter Villages' program, similar to the program for books described above, which includes the publication of village newspapers posted in public places for residents to read (UNESCO 1984).

With regard to writing skills, many educators complain that students receive insufficient training and practice in writing, largely because few teachers of language or other subjects give writing assignments or collect or correct the assignments that they do give. Major reasons for this situation are Indonesia's population boom, which has led to classroom sizes of up to fifty pupils in many elementary and secondary schools; the generally low salaries, which force most teachers to work in two or more schools daily; and, in rural areas, teachers' own lack of competence in writing (Beeby 1979, Nababan 1982, Gonzalez & Prijono 1988, Moegiadi & Jiyono 1994).

The conditions for introducing and sustaining literacy skills in the regional vernacular languages are even more challenging. In addition to providing for the above-mentioned use of the vernaculars as a transitional medium of instruction in the elementary schools, the national curriculum guidelines encourage the schools to assist in the maintenance of the regional languages by offering them as subjects of instruction. Hence, where teaching materials and qualified teachers are available, the vernaculars are taught as subjects for two or three hours per week throughout elementary school and junior and senior high school. Decisions as to which languages will be taught, syllabus content, and materials preparation are made at the provincial level, based on the national syllabus for Bahasa Indonesia and guidelines that have been developed at a series of national seminars since 1976. While most instruction appears to use the Latin alphabet, some schools on Java and Bali teach Javanese and Balinese, respectively, in traditional Indian-based scripts, discussed earlier (Nababan 1982, 1983).

Little information is presently available concerning the results of these classes in the vernaculars. In general, literacy instruction in the regional languages appears to suffer from a lack of trained teachers and a shortage of reading materials, both in and out of the schools (Nababan 1983). For example, Quinn 1983 reports that in the early 1980s, the five major periodicals in Javanese had a relatively stable combined circulation of only 140,000, despite a population of over 70 million speakers of Javanese (Kupiers 1993).

## Conclusion

Despite these problems in maintaining and enhancing literacy skills among its far-flung population, since independence, Indonesia has nonetheless made encouraging progress in the eradication of illiteracy. To a considerable degree, this success results from a complex series of sociocultural, political, economic, and linguistic developments, spanning almost two millennia, that have led to the popular acceptance throughout the country of Bahasa Indonesia as the single national and official language. This acceptance, in turn, has facilitated the preparation, publication, and distribution of uniform literacy materials in one language for use nationwide despite the fact that most Indonesians speak any of several hundred regional vernaculars as their mother tongue. As the educational system has grown to accommodate most Indonesian children through the initial years of primary school, the percentage of Indonesians with at least a rudimentary ability to read and write has increased dramatically. The expansion of nonformal literacy programs to reach the out-of-school population, particularly among the four out of every five Indonesians who live in rural areas, promises to further augment Indonesia's literacy rates. The challenge for Indonesia now is to maintain and expand these basic literacy skills through the increased publication and distribution of textbooks, newspapers, and other reading materials, and through improved training and working conditions for Indonesians responsible for postliteracy instruction.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Malay is also the national and official language in Malaysia, where it is called *Bahasa Malaysia*, and in Brunei. It is the national language and one of four official languages in Singapore (see Lowenberg 1988 for a comparison of its role and functions in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore). Differences among the varieties of Malay used in these countries are slightly greater than differences between British and American English, but these varieties are all mutually intelligible (Nababan 1982). In the 1970s, these varieties of Malay were used as a first or second language by more than 140 million people in Southeast Asia, making Malay the sixth most widely used language in the world (Alisjahbana 1976).

<sup>2</sup> By 1928, 250,000 non-Europeans comprised 90 per cent of all employees in the Netherlands East Indies (Vandenbosch 1944).

<sup>3</sup> Anderson (1983:121) posits, as an additional reason for the use of Malay in colonial education, that 'Because, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Hol-

land had, for all intents and purposes, only one colony, and a huge, profitable one at that, it was quite practical to train its functionaries in a (single) non-European *dienstaal* ... for multi-continental empires like the British, no single locally-based *dienstaal* would have sufficed'.

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