

## Language Politics in Education in Post Independence Timor Leste

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### Abstract

The implementation of Portuguese in teaching and learning activities in primary and secondary schools is the implementation of the mandate of article 13 of the constitution which states that Portuguese and Tetun are the official languages of Timor-Leste. The government of Timor-Leste through the Ministry of Education seeks to implement *phasing in Portuguese and phasing out Indonesian language* program at all levels of education in Timor-Leste which began in 2000 and completed in 2010. The policy is closely related to the implementation of language politics in education. This study was done in a qualitative approach and involved 47 key informants, consisting of 12 primary school teachers, 15 middle school teachers, 10 primary school students and 10 high school students in Dili. The data was obtained through in-depth interviews, field observations and document analysis. The results show that the language politics implemented through the *phasing in Portuguese and phasing out Indonesian language* policies in teaching and learning activities in primary and secondary schools was confusing, contradictory and ambiguous and there was no development as expected by the government. In fact, teachers and students prefer mixing Portuguese-Tetun in teaching and learning activities in the classroom. However, in the final and national examinations, the students were still required to work on questions in Portuguese. Although the language politics was more inclined towards the phasing in Portuguese, what actually happened was the Phasing in *Creol* language (mixing Portuguese and Tetun). In other words, language has been such a problem in education in Timor-Leste.

**Keywords:** *Language Politics, Implementation of Governmental Policy, Portuguese, Tetun and Indonesian Language.*

### Introduction

After the independence, Timor-Leste is not yet free from language politics which has also been experienced by other countries in the world. The language politics aims to synchronize

all dialects spoken in the country. The country expects to only have one national language that could be referred to by all its citizens. The language politics of a country is crucial to maintain its integrity, which is also directly related to their needs for administration, education, diplomatic relations, industry and economy (Suryani, 2014), and even through interaction, both formal and informal (Ignatius, et al., 2019). In relation to the main goal of the language politics, Timor-Leste – through the *Assembly Constituent* – has chosen and determined *Tetun* and Portuguese as the official national language (article 13 paragraph 1), and chosen English and Indonesian language as the working languages (article 159 of the RDTL Constitution). Although both *Tetun* and Portuguese have the same status as an official language, in practice there is still a coercion from the Ministry of Education to use Portuguese as the only language of instruction in the education system in Timor-Leste.

The tendency to use Portuguese as the language of instruction in education occurs by considering that *Tetun* still has limitations. On the other hand, *Tetun* is an indigenous language and a lingua franca used by the majority of people as a language of inter-ethnic and inter-regional communication for decades. However, it still has limitations in relation to the standard of writing in *Tetun* (João Cândia, 2015). Further, it is explained that language politics is a legislative or executive decision that is directly related to the process of determining and using the language to manage and function the politics of state administration (Mann, 2005). Although there is a symbolic element in the choice of official languages, its utilitarian purpose always goes beyond symbolic in ways that are not possessed in other symbols such as flags and songs. Therefore, above the symbolism, the functionality – in terms of language use – is very important for students in the daily life practice to achieve academic success (Wright S, 2014). Language policy – as a decision-making process, expressed formally or implicitly – is used to decide which language to teach to (or learn by) and for what purpose. For purposes of developing science and technology and modernizing the teaching system to achieve efficiency in teaching and learning activities, Portuguese is recognized as the language of instruction in education and *Tetun* plays the role of *Auxiliary Didactic*.

For the target mentioned earlier, the program of *phasing in Portuguese and phasing out Indonesian language* has been implemented. The *phasing in Portuguese and phasing out Indonesian language* for primary schools applies from the 2000/2001 school year to the 2008/2009 school year and it started in the 2012 school year for secondary schools. To

reinforce the program, the Ministry of Education implements the educational law No. 14/2008 of October 29<sup>th</sup>. So far, the language has been a barrier to access and success in higher education; in the sense that *Tetun* has not yet been developed as an academic / scientific language and that most students who enter tertiary education do not have full Portuguese or English proficiency (I. M. Freitas, 2014). Although Portuguese is the second official language in Timor-Leste, limitations in the human resources have resulted in the use of Portuguese not working properly. A study by Freitas, (2014) also shows that Portuguese is the oldest language in Europe that is well structured, so that it can help to develop and expand *Tetun* into a modern language that can be used in the national education system in the future.

However in reality, the use of Portuguese in the practice of teaching and learning activities in primary and secondary schools in Timor-Leste is highly distorted. It is so confusing, contradictory and ambiguous that the designation of Portuguese as the language of instruction in education has negative implications for teaching and learning activities and the quality of primary and high school graduates in Timor-Leste. The impact caused by the implementation of language politics carried in education in post-independence Timor-Leste has experienced various challenges, but there has not been a comprehensive study which examines Portuguese language practices in teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools in post-independence Timor-Leste. Using this research gap as the basic, this present study aims to contribute to supporting the determination of strategies or steps considered important and effective for the assimilation of Portuguese in Timor-Leste society through education.

### **Method**

#### **Design**

This study was done in a qualitative manner to understand the implementation of Portuguese as the official language in education, its problems faced by both teachers and students during the process of teaching and learning activities in primary and secondary schools and the strategies in resolving them.

#### **Data Collection Tools**

The data was collected through: 1) interview – unstructured designed with follow-up-open questions for further information; 2) field observation – observing the conditions where the teachers and students were interacting in the classroom to validate the informants' answers in relation to the behavior of using Portuguese in class; and 3) document analysis – done to

obtain information on documents or literatures consisting of information of the implementation of Portuguese in education such as books which were in line with the research objective.

### Research Process

This research was carried out in Timor-Leste, specifically in the capital city of Dili in July 2016 to July 2017. Dili was selected as the research setting based on several considerations, such as aspects of Dili as the city of students of all levels of education and it was easily accessible. The study involved 47 key informants, consisting of 12 primary school teachers, 15 middle school teachers, 10 primary school students and 10 high school students. They were all contributed in the teaching and learning activities in classrooms. Table 1. Key informan of primary and secondary school teachers.

**Table 1. Key Informants of Primary and Secondary School Teachers**

	Nama guru/umur	Lama Bekerja	Latar belakan Pendidikan	Pendidikan
<b>Guru Sekolah Dasar</b>	Ana Rosalia Guterres (29)	8 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA Indonesia PT Timor-Leste	D III
	Angelina dos Santos (43)	15 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	D II
	Alberto de Fatima (45)	15 tahun	SD, SMP dan SMA Indonesia	SMA
	Beatriz dos Santos Belo (43)	16 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	D II
	Belina Alves Pereira (30)	4 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Timor-Leste	S1
	Calisto da Silva (54)	17 tahun	SD SMP Portugis SPG Indonesia	SPG
	José António (32)	8 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	D III
	Luis Soares (44)	17 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	S2
	Mario Pinto (46)	17 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	S1
	Mariano de A. Soares (43)	15 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA Indonesia PT Timor-Leste	D III
	Mario dos Santos (42)	8 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	D III
	Timotio Gusmão (49)	17 tahun	SD SMP Portugis SPG dan PT Indonesia	D II
<b>Guru Sekolah Menengah Atas</b>	Abel do Rosario Sarmiento (44)	17 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA, PT Indonesia dan Timor-Leste	S1
	Abilio da Silva Fernandes (37)	15 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	S1
	Afonso Sarmiento (43)	18 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	S1
	Afonso N. da Costa Soares (41)	17 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	S1
	Agustinho Belo (46)	18 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	S1
	Bendito Ximenes	18 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	S1

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António (48)				
Carlos Salsinha	18 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	S1	
Domingos Gusmão (56)	17 tahun	SD SMP Portugis SPG dan PT Timor -Leste	D III	
Emidio Amaral (46)	16 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	S1	
George C. de A. Pereira (48)	17 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	S1	
Inacio Marcelino Guterres (43)	15 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	S1	
João Guterres (56)	17 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	S1	
Marcelino A. da Costa (46)	17 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA dan PT Indonesia	S1	
Pedro da Silva (40)	17 tahun	SD, SMP, SMA, PT Indonesia dan Portugal	S2	
Trinito Sarmiento (57)	18 tahun	SD SMP Portugis SPG Indonesia PT T.Leste	D III	
Nama Siswa/umur	Lama Belajar	Lembaga Pendidikan	Kelas	
<b>Siswa dan Siswi Sekolah Dasar dan Menengah</b>	Ana G. da Costa A. Soares (19)	12 tahun	SD, SMP dan SMA	III
	Arina de Jesus	9 tahun	SD dan SMP	III
	Anabela de Jesus	9 tahun	SD dan SMP	III
	Andre da Costa Perreira	9 tahun	SD dan SMP	III
	Antonia Sarmiento	9 tahun	SD dan SMP	III
	Arnaldo Leite	9 tahun	SD dan SMP	III
	Clara Ramos Pinto	12 tahun	SD, SMP dan SMA	III
	Cecilia Maria dos Reis	12 tahun	SD, SMP dan SMA	III
	José G. C. da C. Soares (15)	9 tahun	SD dan SMP	III
	Jose Amaral	9 tahun	SD dan SMP	III
	Juvinal da Costa	9 tahun	SD dan SMP	III
	Joanico Patricio de Carvalho	12 tahun	SD, SMP dan SMA	III
	Jesuina Miranda Soares	12 tahun	SD, SMP dan STM	III
	Mateus Jeronimo	12 tahun	SD, SMP dan SMA	III
	Olinda Pereira	9 tahun	SD dan SMP	III
	Pascoal Soares	12 tahun	SD, SMP dan SMA	III
	Severina da C. Moreira	12 tahun	SD, SMP dan SMA	III
	Tersinha M. Da C. Soares (21)	12 tahun	SD, SMP dan SMA	III
	Tomazia Martins	12 tahun	SD, SMP dan SMA	III
	Zonas da Silva	9 tahun	SD dan SMP	III

Source: Research results, reprocessed data, 2017

### **Analysis of Data**

The data was analyzed using the Miles and Huberman analysis model, consisting of data reduction and presentation, and drawing conclusions. The stages of a qualitative data analysis include: 1) transcribing the data from interviews, field observations and document analysis; 2) identifying and describing the data; 3) presenting the classified data; and 4) drawing conclusions from the interpreted data based on the research focus (Matthew & Huberman, 2014).

### **Findings**

The Timor-Leste government had implemented Portuguese in education through the *phasing in Portuguese* since 2000. The *phasing in Portuguese and phasing out Indonesian language* for primary school level began in the academic year of 2000/2001. In this school year, the phasing in Portuguese began to be applied at the first graders with Portuguese as the language of instruction in teaching and learning activities, replacing the Indonesian language. Meanwhile, the second graders of primary schools could not take final exams due to the referendum in 1999 where the teaching process was done using Indonesian language. Assuming that the students were first graders in the school year of 2000/2001, the *phasing in Portuguese* started in the school year of 2001/2002 when they were the second graders, and so did the *phasing out Indonesian language*. Therefore, there was a shift and changes between Portuguese and Indonesian language in the teaching and learning process at the primary school level. In the school year of 2005/2006, the *phasing out Indonesian language* was targeted to be completed. By that time, the Indonesian language had disappeared from its use as a medium of instruction in primary school education.

The *phasing in Portuguese and phasing out Indonesian language* program for the third and fourth graders only happened when Tetun and Portuguese had become the official languages of RDTL on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2002. The discussion of the program – which was initially the National Resistance Council of Timor instruction – was then continued at the 1<sup>st</sup> National Congress of Education on October 29<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>, 2003 (MECJD, 2003). The congress decided that the process of *phasing in Portuguese and phasing out Indonesia language* shall be continued according to their goals: the *phasing in Portuguese* started in 2000 for the primary schools and the *phasing out Indonesian language* started in the school year of 2012/2013 for higher education.

The implementation of Portuguese at the middle school level was stopped due to the crisis in the body of the Timor-Leste army forces in 2006. The process of *phasing in Portuguese and phasing out Indonesian language* for the middle school was continued in 2007 along with the issuance of Resolution of Ministry of Education No. 3/2007 on March 21<sup>st</sup>. In the fourth part of the Resolution, it regulates the reusing Portuguese as an introduction to education in teaching and learning activities and *Tetun* as a didactic auxiliary language. The process of re-implementing the *phasing in Portuguese and phasing out Indonesian language* program for secondary schools was continued in the school year of 2007/2008 after the military crisis ended in 2006.

For the *phasing in Portuguese* program, the Lisbon government sent 126 Portuguese teachers who were then placed in every secondary school throughout Timor-Leste. The teachers helped the students to understand Portuguese better and were tutors for the local Portuguese teachers. The school year of 2007/2008 were when the *phasing in Portuguese and phasing out Indonesian language* started for secondary schools. The fundamental reason underlying the *phasing in Portuguese* was that the students graduated from the primary schools had fluently spoken Portuguese. Naturally, the Indonesian language would be replaced in the eighth grade and the *phasing out Indonesian language* would happen to the ninth graders in the school year of 2009/2010. Thus, Portuguese could be used as the language of instruction in the class for all subjects except *Tetun*.

The school year of 2010/2011 was when the *phasing in Portuguese and phasing out Indonesian language* started for senior and vocational high schools. Gradually, the Portuguese replaced the Indonesian language in 2010 and completely disappeared in 2013. The logical consequence of implementing Portuguese to the students – starting from primary to senior/vocational schools and who had spoken Portuguese fluently – was that they would have the *phasing in Portuguese and phasing out Indonesian language* program when they continued their college in the school year of 2012/2013. By this time, all private or state universities must have used Portuguese as the only language of instruction in the education system.

However, in practice, it was still contradictory with the targets planned by the Ministry of Education of Timor-Leste. Most of the teachers would only translate their materials from Portuguese to *Tetun*. For this reason, the Ministry of Education, through the Research,

Supervision and Evaluation Development Cabinet, conducted a diagnostic test to 13,857 teachers from primary to secondary schools which aimed to understand their Portuguese proficiency. The results showed that only 78% of them had beginner to primary level of Portuguese proficiency, 21% had low to high intermediate level, and only 1% of them had advanced level. Below, Table 2. presents the results of diagnostic test.

**Table 2. Results of Portuguese Diagnostic Test (First Batch: 19/12/2015; Second Batch: 20/04/2016)**

Nº	Municípios/Dist riks	Nível de Proficiência/Tingkat Kecakapan Berbahasa Portugis					Total Guru
		Beginner <b>A1</b>	Elementary <b>A2</b>	Low Intermediate <b>B1</b>	High Intermediate <b>B2</b>	Advanced <b>C1</b>	
1	Aileu	232	187	135	27	5	586
2	Ainaro	393	234	187	67	3	884
3	Baucau	638	613	193	157	39	1640
4	Bobonaro	832	336	86	22	4	1280
5	Ermera	787	145	79	63	12	1086
6	Covalima	690	180	23	5	2	900
7	Díli	881	769	537	170	91	2448
8	Liquiça	309	283	74	22	5	693
9	Lautém	209	309	269	48	13	848
10	Manatuto	257	357	214	65	12	905
11	Manufahi	438	297	117	41	10	903
12	RAEOA/Oecussi	277	322	157	35	4	795
13	Viqueque	402	328	150	5	4	889
<b>Total</b>	<b>Professores/Guru</b>	<b>6345</b>	<b>4360</b>	<b>2221</b>	<b>727</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>13.857</b>
Percentagem/Persentase (%)		45,78%	31,46%	16,02%	0,0524%	0,0147%	100%
		46%	32%	16%	5%	1%	%
		78%		21%		1%	

**Source:** Research, Supervision and Evaluation Development Cabinet of Ministry of Education of Timor-Leste



Based on the diagnostic test results, 78% of them have beginner level of proficiency and according to Common European Framework of reference for language, this level of proficiency could not guarantee that the teaching and learning process using Portuguese would be done optimally. While the rest 21% and 1% have sufficient and excellent skills to teach using Portuguese. This fact had a serious impact on the students' proficiency level. Results of a research by Dili Institute of Technology (DIT) in 2012 also confirmed that "...the students do not speak well any of these 4 languages: *Tetun*, Portuguese, English and Indonesian" (Godinho, 2012). From the field observations, this study also found that both teachers and students were far from enough Portuguese proficiency level to support the teaching and learning process. Besides, a research by Scartezini also confirmed that both teachers and students did not have enough Portuguese proficiency to interact and communicate in the classrooms (Scartezini, 2016). This problem was also revealed by a key informant who was a high school teacher in Dili as follows:

*"As a biology teacher, I have a difficulty in explaining the materials to students as I cannot speak Portuguese. This difficulty makes me use two to three languages. If there is a scientific biology terminology which I cannot find it in Tetun but is in Portuguese and I do not understand it, I prefer to use Indonesian language by analogizing in Tetun to make it easier for students to understand the materials as a final objective of special instructions (ICT)".*

The other key informant also shared his experience in interacting and communicating with teachers and fellow students in the teaching and learning process:

*"The textbooks and teacher handbooks distributed by the Ministry of Education to our school are in Portuguese. However, these books are very limited, so we have to take notes. The teachers only give notes and explanations in the form of translations from the existing textbooks. Besides, there is also a unique and interesting phenomenon in learning Portuguese language material. The teachers who teach Portuguese do not use Portuguese, but the Portuguese material is translated to Tetun. This is the situation we have experienced so far at 28 de Novembro Public Middle".*

During the process of implementing Portuguese in post-independence Timor-Leste, there were problems, challenges and also various polemics. One of the interesting polemics was the implementation of only one language at Fatumeta Junior High School, where students had to only speak Portuguese. If they violated the rule, they would be fined by paying one dollar to the principal. The findings mentioned above explain that in practice, the implementation of

Portuguese in education was so deviant from what the Ministry of Education advised and targeted and demanded by article 13 of the RDTL Constitution.

### **Problems Faced by Teachers**

Most of the local teachers were not capable of speaking Portuguese or lacked of its proficiency for teaching purposes. It also explained that out of 15,304 primary and secondary teachers, there were only 7% (1,015) of them with Portuguese education background, and the rest 93% (14,289) of them had Indonesian language education background. This problem was caused by several factors, including *first*, the failed assimilation of Portuguese language during 460-year-Portuguese authority (1515-1975) so that it did not mix with the community; *second*, the implementation of Portuguese colonial education was very slow and discriminatory which made it impossible to have many local teachers who had native-like Portuguese fluency.

In the beginning of 1960s, the colonial government did not pay any attention to the education sector. In the Portuguese colonial authority, the education sector was neglected compared to other colonies in Africa. One of the problems was that the only educational goal they wanted to achieved was to create a new class in the society through assimilation where they would run the colonial government for the local community on behalf of the Portuguese government (Moreira, 2016).

The policy of expanding education throughout Timor-Leste was started in the end of 1960s and beginning of 1970s. It was not due to good intentions from the Portuguese colonialist and instead of the following three factors: (1) there was an international pressure on the education policy implemented by the colonial government; (2) there was a rebellion in Watulari of Vique-que in 1959; and (3) there were independence movements in the Africa colonies such as Angola, Mozambique, Cavo Verde, Guine Bisau, and São Tome principe. The allocation time for a Portuguese intensive course from the Ministry of Education of Timor-Leste was very short and not sustainable. It was only a three-month-course and a total of 150 hours. It was stopped for one or two years before it was continued. A key informant stated that:

*“Portuguese teachers came and taught Portuguese to local teachers for 3-4 hours a day for 2-3 months. It was inadequate, very short, and it got worse that when they went home, they spoke their native languages instead of Portuguese with their family. It has been a problem for our local teachers. Meanwhile, the*

*allocation time of trainings for teachers of other subjects such as mathematic and biology is not fixed. Sometimes, there are also 5-6 days off, but sometimes not”.*

The resistance, according to Emidio Amaral, was aimed to achieve independence and not to fight for a language. Timor-Leste had been using Tetun as a language of communication between regions. Afonso Napoleão also claimed that since the beginning of the restoration of independence, he had been opposing Portuguese as Timor-Leste was no longer a Portuguese overseas province, but it was a dependent country and the use of Portuguese was such an attempt at cultural and language imperialism.

### **Problems Faced by Students**

The problems faced by students in implementing Portuguese as a language of instruction in education were various. For example, the Portuguese teachers taught the grammar using Tetun. It explained that they only translated the materials on textbooks to the students, but did not necessarily taught them to understand the grammatical structures, and neither how time worked and written. They were such obstacles or challenges in learning Portuguese. A key informant shared his experience as follows:

*“We have been learning Portuguese by taking notes from the textbooks given by the teachers which are written in Portuguese. If there is still enough time, the teachers will explain the materials by translating each sentence we have noted. If we run out of time, the materials will be replaced with other materials or we just simply go home. They do not teach use the grammatical structure of Portuguese and the timelines. The only Portuguese we heard from our local teachers are “fecha a boca” which means to be silent, “já acabou” which means finished, “ainda não” which means not yet, and “depressa” which means to do it fast. They are the only Portuguese words we hear since primary to secondary schools. Meanwhile, in other subjects, we only take notes them in Portuguese and the teachers will explain in Tetun”.*

The other problems were that either the Portuguese or other subjects’ teachers only gave the students books to take notes instead of teaching them and told them that the explanations would be on the next week’s class. In the next class, the teachers would only ask whether they had understood the materials. If the students had not understood them, the teachers would only translate the notes they made in the past week until the time was over. There was even a junior high school which did not have any Portuguese teacher, making none of the students learned it until they graduated. Many students also shared similar experience until they were in senior high school. The only Portuguese words they had heard from their

teachers are “*fecha a boca* (keep silent), *já acabou* (have finished), *ainda não* (not yet), *voces sabes* (you have understood), *ate próximo semana* (see you next week)”. Thus, the problems faced by students in all regions of Dili were similar, where the Portuguese teaching process was not sufficient nor ideal as expected because the teachers did not have the skills nor the mastery of Portuguese.

### **Choices of Teachers’ and Students’ Strategies**

The effort to translate Portuguese into Tetun was the strategy used by the informants to be able to master Portuguese in teaching and learning activities in the classroom. The observations made by researchers from 2015 to 2017 in several primary and secondary schools – such as Camea Rai Hun State Elementary School, Camea Centro Primary School, Esperanca Patria Junior High School, Sergio Vieira de Melo Junior High School, 12 November High School, 28 November High School and Becora State Vocational High School – show that the choice of strategies the key informants used were similar: translating the materials in Portuguese to Tetun. Tetun was mostly used by teachers and students in the class (de facto). A freshman of 12 November State Senior High School admitted that since he was in primary to secondary school, the teachers would only translate the materials so that he only understood Tetun. The Portuguese materials used by the teachers were Tetungez – a mix of Tetun and Portuguese vocabulary.

The field observations made repeatedly found that Tetun was generally used in every communication both inside and outside the classroom. If the teacher used Portuguese in class, the students would only listen to him until the class was over. The students would not be active and preferred to keep silent during the class because they did not understand what the teacher was explaining about. It would seem like the teacher was talking to himself when he asked the students using Portuguese. In contrast, if he asked using Tetun, many students would raise their hands and be actively answering. When the researcher asked to one of the senior students of Esperanca da Patria Junior High School why she and her classmates kept silent during the Portuguese class, she stated that they did not understand Portuguese and it was impossible for them to ask or answer questions. That was why they remained silent.

A key informant who was also a teacher at SMEAN Dili shared his experienced in teaching using Portuguese. He revealed that in an hour, the students would no longer pay attention to him if he taught in Portuguese. One of the alternatives he used was to translate although it

might be boring for them. In fact, the students would really leave the class one by one and linger outside. If he asked them where they went, they would answer that they were in the toilet. This situation continued for years without significant changes. Another alternative was to use Tetun as the language of instruction during the teaching and learning process. He had been using it for years until the present (2015). Therefore, the students' Portuguese proficiency was not enough to understand materials taught in Portuguese. When they were taught and allowed to ask and answer questions in Tetun, it would be easier for them to understand the materials.

### Discussion

The implementation of Portuguese as a language of instruction in education, especially in primary to secondary schools in Timor-Leste, began with two major programs: (1) Reusing Portuguese Project (*projecto de re-introdução da língua Portuguesa*) and (2) Portuguese Consolidation Project (*projecto de consolidação da língua Portuguesa*) (Barbeiro, 2010). The first program was done thorough formal education where the Portuguese was re-introduced through intensive Portuguese courses held by the Ministry of Education with the help of Portuguese teachers from *Instituto Português de Apoio ao Desenvolvimento*, IPAD and *Camões* Institution to teachers in Timor-Leste since the beginning of UN transitional government in 2000. The second program was carried out through formal education at diploma level (*Bacharelato Nocturno, BN*). The local teachers who had previously only learned Portuguese through intensive courses would be directed didactic and pedagogic learning in each district throughout Timor-Leste in the school year of 2004/2005.

Both programs had trained 8,880 primary and secondary teachers, consisting of: (1) 3,900 teachers with Diploma III; (2) 380 vocational high school teachers focusing on Portuguese courses which who was also dealt with workshop practices daily; (3) 150 teachers completed pedagogic education and training; (4) 2,000 junior high school teachers and 2,000 senior high school teachers completed pedagogic education and training; and (5) 450 student teachers who had to finish their study (Avelar, 2007-2013). To further intensify the local teachers in using Portuguese as the language of instruction in the teaching and learning activities in schools, Law No. 4/2011 was issued on January 26<sup>th</sup>. Through this law, a national teacher training institute (*INFORDEPE* in Portuguese) was established. The institute organized formal education to prepare educators expected to implement Portuguese in teaching and learning activities in primary and secondary schools according to the lawsuits. It took 3 years

to complete the education program with a total credit load of 160. This education program was equivalent to primary school teacher education (*Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar* (PGSD)) and secondary school teacher education (*Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Lanjutan Tingkat Pertama* (PGSLTP)) during the Indonesian government (Freitas, 2014).

The Minister of Education in his remarks said that the INFORDEPE had graduated as many as 1,206 primary and junior high school teachers, with the following details: the first graduation on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011 had 375 Diploma III graduates, the second graduation on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011 had 197 Diploma III graduates, the third graduation on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012 had 634 Diploma III graduates, consisting of 225 Portuguese language teachers for junior high schools, 54 Portuguese language teachers for primary schools, 28 physics teachers, 128 mathematics teachers, 10 chemistry teachers and 135 biology teachers for middle school. As a consequence of the above efforts, in the 2013/2014 school year, all textbooks both for students and for the teachers were published in Portuguese. In 2014, the Ministry of Education distributed 23,000 books for primary, junior, senior and vocational high school students and 4,500 Portuguese language dictionary books for junior high school (ACETL, 2014).

Despite the efforts made by the Ministry of Education of Timor-Leste to qualify teachers at the primary and secondary school level in using Portuguese as the language of instruction in teaching and learning activities in schools, quantitatively, Mário José Avelar mentioned in his thesis that 8,880 primary and secondary education teachers had participated in the requalification program. Besides, Minister of Education João Cancio Freitas in his speech said that 1,206 teachers had completed teacher education at INFORDEPE. In terms of Portuguese language proficiency in primary and secondary schools, as reported by the Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Development Cabinet in 2016 that 10,705 (78%) teachers did not have the minimum proficiency in delivering material in class in Portuguese.

While 2,948 (21%) teachers experienced development but were not enough to teach material in Portuguese and only 204 (1%) teachers had the minimum skills to teach using Portuguese. However, the results of this study indicated that the creole languages dominated the teaching and learning activities both in primary and secondary schools. In fact, both teachers and students did not have the skills in both Portuguese and Tetun in teaching and learning

activities in class. With this condition, the mix of Tetun-Portuguese was such an alternative in conveying material in class.

Meanwhile, the students' perspective showed that the majority of them felt more confident using Tetun, rather than Portuguese. J.A. Foley and M.F. Deocampo, (2016), showed that a language could be understood by also considering the cultural context where the language existed and was used. In addition, they suggested that in the teaching and learning process, it was better to combine Portuguese and Tetun or Tetun only. This fact showed that the students did not feel confident enough with one of the languages such as Portuguese or Tetun. In this situation, it was not surprising that both teachers and students spent a lot of time translating materials from Portuguese into Tetun or vice versa. In relation to this problem, Bomgbose said that language was the most important factor in the learning process, because it helped transferring science and skills through either spoken words or written language (Bamgbose, September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1992).

Qorro further explained that the language of instruction was such a vehicle, and it helped education to be delivered. The role of the language of instruction was like a water pipe that run water from one pipe / destination to another. Further, the role of the language of instruction could also be compared to copper electric wires in transmitting electricity from one station to another. Just like pipes – an important medium in running water, and copper wire was an important medium for transmitting electricity. The language of instruction was an indispensable medium for transferring science from the teachers to students, as well as transferring knowledge among fellow students (Qorro, 2006). Besides, it should be emphasized that the language of instruction would only function effectively and efficiently if both teachers and students understood the language of instruction used in facilitating the teaching and learning activities.

The teachers and students would also only be able to discuss, debate, ask and be able to answer questions and ask for clarification in developing and producing knowledge if they had the proficiency and ability in the language of instruction they used. Understanding and mastery of the language of instruction by the teachers and students was a major requirement in developing the teaching and learning activities in achieving quality education. Thus, the language of instruction was the most important factor in determining the quality of education (Qorro, 2006).

Linking the language of instruction in the education to the theories explained by the two experts mentioned earlier, it could be concluded that the language of instruction in the education was such a paradox which prevented the transfer of knowledge from the teachers to students. As a result, the students could not receive the expected quality education. These facts contributed to the reproduction of material which naturally slowed down the teaching and learning process in the classroom. When the teachers and students did not master the language of instruction in education correctly and fluently, it would bring an impact on the quality of teaching and learning activities as the process of knowledge transfer was ineffective. Therefore, the language of instruction in education was one of the most important factors in achieving the quality of education. If the mastery of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes was a measure of the quality of education, then the quality of Timor-Leste's education was still far from what was expected, because the process of acquiring knowledge from the teachers by students was done through mixed languages with intermittent meanings as required described (Qorro, 2006).

It was important to note that the language targeted in the teaching and learning process was Portuguese, but what happened was only the translation from Portuguese to Tetun or vice versa. Thus, the systematic learning process, efficiency and effectiveness in transferring knowledge from the teachers to students could not be achieved in the current Timor-Leste education system. This condition was exactly the same that happened in Tanzania. Brock (2001) explained that: the results of a study by Anderson (1975) and Mvungi (1982) showed that the proficiency of the language of instruction of both the teachers' and students' was the most important factor in transferring knowledge and science from the teachers and students in improving the performance and quality of education. Lack of this language' skills by the teachers and students would have a negative impact on the subjects taught.

This case occurred in Tanzania where the teachers and students did not have English language skills but were required to use it as the language of instruction in education. As a result of language politics that was quite unrealistic, it brought an impact on the declining quality of education in Tanzania. Therefore, both teachers' and students' proficiency level of the language were the key to the success of a country's education (Brock, 2001). Furthermore, Qorro added that the quality of education could only be achieved if teachers and students mastered the language of instruction in education (Qorro, 2006).



The implementation of Portuguese as a language of instruction in education had several serious problems, because the majority of teachers, both primary and secondary schools, did not have the required proficiency of Portuguese language skills in teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Therefore, a choice of strategies implemented to resolve the problems faced was the Creole language – the mix of Portuguese and Tetun. This condition had a negative impact on the quality of Timor-Leste's education. In fact, the high school students did not have the language skills, both in Portuguese and Tetun, to study in higher institutions. A study by the Dili Institute of Technology (DIT) (2012) reported that the level of language proficiency of students who graduated from secondary school was not enough to study at the university (DIT, 2012). As a result of the inability of students in both Portuguese and Tetun, only few of them could pass the entrance selection for universities. In 2016, all students (100%) were graduated from senior high school, but only 13% (3,000) of them passed the national entrance selection for state universities (*Ujian Masuk Perguruan Tinggi Negeri* (UMPTN), while the rest 87% (20,993) failed. This fact clearly explained that the language of instruction in education had a very negative impact on the quality of primary and secondary school education in Timor-Leste.

### **Conclusion**

The study found that various attempts had been made by the Timor-Leste government to qualify teachers in using Portuguese as the language of instruction in teaching and learning activities in primary and secondary schools, but the reality was very different from expectations. Timor-Leste has four languages, consisting of two official languages (Tetun and Portuguese) and two working languages (English and Indonesian language). The results show that: both primary and secondary schools did not use Portuguese fully in the teaching and learning activities. Practically, the language they used was the creole language – a mixture of Tetun and Portuguese. The internalization or assimilation of Portuguese to the local teachers through intensive Portuguese language courses organized by IPAD and IC from year to year began to decline. The government required the use of Portuguese in the teaching and learning activities at all levels of education, but there was no specific budget from the Timor-Leste government for Portuguese and Tetun language development training. The Tetun-Portuguese mixed language used in the teaching and learning process had a very negative impact on the quality of primary and secondary school graduates. These inadequate language skills made most students and graduates from high school failed to continue their studies at public universities, especially in Timor-Leste. Further, it was also more difficult to

access higher education in the community of Portuguese-speaking countries, such as Portugal, Brazil, Cavo Verde, Guine Bisau, Angola and Mocambique.

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