



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH TEACHING IN CIREBON

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abstract

In 2013 Curriculum, English is not explicitly mentioned as one of the subjects at the Elementary School level. Thus, the schools are not required to teach English to their students. However, some elementary schools still include English as one of the subjects and classroom teachers as an English teacher. Therefore, this research was aimed to figure out elementary school teachers' perceptions on English teaching *and school policy background in teaching English*. This research used the descriptive method with questionnaires and interviews as the research instruments. The respondents of this research were 100 elementary school teachers. The result of the study revealed that most of the teachers assume that English is needed by elementary school students. The elementary school period is considered the best time to learn English, and they believe that English specialist teachers will be able to teach English better than the classroom teachers do. The data were then triangulated to the result of the interviews with 11 principals. The result showed that 4 of 11 elementary schools still conducted English teaching and 7 schools did not implement English teaching because English is excluded from the 2013 Curriculum. All of the principals stated that the main problem of the implementation of English teaching at Elementary school was the availability of English specialist teachers.

INTRODUCTION

English is one of foreign languages in Indonesia. The language has a similar position as the other foreign languages. However, the English language is placed as an international language. Therefore, in this globalization era, English is considered as the language that should be mastered by the young generation. English should have been taught from an early age. Violetta-Irene (2013) believes that at early ages, children are more enthusiastic and eager to learn a new language and its culture.

English teaching at the elementary school level had been included in Curriculum 1994 as one of the local content that could be chosen by the schools. Local content is supporting skills that can be taught to students by considering local potential around the students' living. Many elementary schools still apply English teaching to support the students' skills although the

students' social and cultural environment is not tourism sites. Yet, the Regulation of Ministry of Education and Culture No. 67, 2013, on The Basic Framework and Curriculum, English is not included in the 2013 Curriculum. Meanwhile in *Kurikulum Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP)*, English is one of the local content subjects at the elementary school level.

The policy of the implementation of English outside the 2013 curriculum gets some criticisms. Dewi (2014) states that English subject does not have a clear position in the 2013 curriculum. It is not mentioned explicitly as a compulsory subject, a local content subject, or an extracurricular. Kaltsum (2016) found out that one of the Elementary Schools in Surakarta still implemented English teaching. The school placed English as a local content subject as stated in KTSP with a scientific approach as the 2013 curriculum mandatory.

On the other hand, the Vice Minister of Education and Culture, Musliar in Kompas (2012), believes that students of elementary school should focus on learning the Indonesian language (*Bahasa Indonesia*) as the national language before they learn foreign languages. Moreover, students are also encouraged to learn their mother tongues instead of foreign languages (Tursinawati, et. al., 2019). Meanwhile, Anjarwati (2015) suggests that teachers provide English materials that involve Indonesian cultures such as Indonesian legend, songs, and games. Therefore, the teaching materials provided are not merely about English culture but they can include Indonesian cultures.

Teachers as the ones who implement the government policy may have their own perception of teaching English at the elementary school level. Perception in this research refers to the process of understanding and acknowledging objects or events based on ones' experience (Pieter, et. al., 2011).

Teachers' Perception

Perception is one's effort to accept the phenomenon around them (Lyons, 2009). Pieter et, al (2011) believe that perception is the process of understanding and acknowledging an object or an event based on ones' experience. Teachers' perception of this study refers to what teachers feel and think about English teaching at elementary school based on their teaching experience.

English Teaching at Elementary School

Since the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum, many elementary schools do not implement English teaching. On the other hand, learning English at young ages give many advantages for students. Istiqomah (2016) said English teaching can give students the

opportunity to obtain learning experience about foreign cultures, besides Indonesian culture. Moreover, the materials taught to the students are not only about the cultures of English spoken countries but also Indonesian cultures that can be described in the English language.

In addition, Violetta-Irene (2013) mentions four advantages of English learning at early ages:

1. English learning can lead students to be broadminded about foreign cultures and develop sympathetic to other human beings.
2. English learning helps students to bond communication to a comprehension of the new concept.
3. English learning at early ages can maximize students' opportunity to learn English
4. Students English competence at early ages can be useful for them to understand English teaching instruction in the future

At an early age, children can master foreign languages as they have the ability to retain information better than adults (Siregar, 2018). Therefore, English teachers in elementary schools should be able to recognize their students' characteristics and learning styles (Musthafa, 2010). Furthermore, Elementary School English teachers should have good spoken English skills since children will copy what their teachers say and pronounce (Harmer, 2007). Unfortunately, there are many English teachers at the elementary school level who do not have an English Education background. They are the students' classroom teachers who are struggling to teach English. Meanwhile, Butler (2015) states that English language teaching should be conducted by teachers with good English competence. Thus, classroom teachers should get some English teaching training in order to increase their English teaching competence (Okumura, 2017).

Scott & Ytreberg (2004) proposed several English language teaching principles at the elementary school level:

1. Minimizing lecturing method in which teachers focus on giving wordy explanation because children prefer learning activities that involve physical movements.
2. Facilitating students with learning activities that include words games, like songs and storytelling
3. Administering various learning activities
4. Doing the repetition of learning activities and materials to make students memorize the materials

5. Preventing doing a competition and giving rewards to students. Teachers should be able to let students involve in learning activities and feel teamwork spirit
6. Minimizing grammar teaching, teach students simple grammar
7. Conducting evaluation through doing interaction with students in recognizing students' learning progress

Teachers as the implementers of government policy may have their own perception of English teaching at the Elementary School level based on their teaching experience.

English Teaching in Indonesian Curriculum

English teaching at elementary school had been determined in Decree No. 0487, 1992. It is mentioned that elementary schools can add some subjects as long as the subjects are not contradicted with national education goals. Thus, in the 1994 Curriculum, elementary schools had autonomy on adding English as one of local content by considering the potential region where the students live (The Ministerial Decree of Education and Culture No. 79, 2014, on Local Content Subjects). Moreover, according to The Regulation of Ministry of National Education No. 23, 2006, on Graduates Competency Standards, English is determined as one of the local content subjects at elementary school with four English skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) that should be taught to students.

Since the implementation of English teaching at elementary school, there are many issues faced by schools and teachers. Many schools do not have English specialist teachers. Thus, they demand the classroom teachers to teach their students while most of the teachers are not competent in English teaching. In addition, students of elementary schools are considered not ready to learn a foreign language. Therefore, according to The Ministerial Decree of Education and Culture No. 67, 2013, on The Basic Framework and Curriculum, English is not included as one of the subjects on the 2013 Curriculum, neither as a compulsory subject nor local content subject.

Considering the aforementioned issue, this research portrays Elementary School teachers' and principals' perception of English teaching and the school policy of the implementation of English teaching at the elementary school level.

METHOD

This research used the descriptive method by administering a survey and interview. One hundred respondents were selected based on a convenient sampling method in which they were chosen based on the availability and convenient access to the research sites (Vanderstoep & Johnson, 2009).

The respondents of this research were 100 elementary school teachers in Cirebon. This research did not only involve English teachers with English education background because there are many elementary school teachers who had experience of teaching English at school.

The questionnaires covered closed-ended questions about teachers' profiles and teachers' perceptions on English teaching at elementary school adapted from Violetta-Irene (2013) and MEXT (Okumura, 2017). Closed-ended questionnaires with Likert Scale were used to obtain the data of elementary school teachers' perception divided into 5 points: Strongly Agree, Agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Data collection was conducted by visiting each school and distributing the questionnaires to the teachers. In addition, the headmasters of the schools were invited to do interviews. The interview questions focused on the schools' policy on the implementation of English teaching.

The collected data were calculated using the following formula

$$P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100\%$$

(Hermawan, 2019)

P= Percentage

f= Frequency of the answer

n= Total number of respondent

The data of survey were then triangulated with the interviews conducted with the schools' principals in order to find out the school's background policy on the implementation of English teaching.

Meanwhile the interviews were conducted by recording the conversation. The data from the interviews were transcribed. Finally, the results of the survey and interviews were explained descriptively and analyzed based on related theories

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Survey

Teachers' Profile

This research involves 100 teachers from 11 elementary schools in Cirebon. Based on the survey finding, there were only two teachers with an English Education background while 98 teachers are not holding an English Education degree.

37 of the teachers (37%) have English teaching experience. Of 37 teachers, there were only two teachers who have an English education background. So there are 35 teachers who are not specialist English teachers. Although they are not English teachers they teach English as the schools do not have specialist English teachers. Meanwhile, 63% of 100 teachers never teach English.

From the interviews with 11 principals, there are 4 schools that still conduct English teaching while 7 schools decide not to implement English teaching as it is not mandated by the 2013 Curriculum. Two schools have English specialist teachers and the other schools demand the classroom teachers to be the English teachers.

The Necessity of English Subject at Elementary School Level

The survey finding shows that 49% of teachers agree that English needs to be taught since elementary school. Meanwhile, 33% of the teachers or 33 teachers are neutral. They may think that they are not sure about English teaching at elementary school because of the lack of specialist teachers and they are not proficient in English teaching.

The government's decision on English teaching at elementary school by omitting English from the 2013 curriculum raises some criticism. In this globalization era, English is needed by the young generation, including elementary school students. Meanwhile, others say that elementary school students are not ready for learning a foreign language. Government is concerned about students' mother tongue. Students of elementary school are expected to master their mother tongues instead of foreign language (Tursinawati, et.al., 2019).

Surprisingly 55% of the teachers agree that English should be excluded from the curriculum, English should be extracurricular. Based on the interviews with Principal 1, he assumes that it is better for the students to learn English in after school activity because students of elementary school are not ready for learning foreign languages. Moreover, the teachers are not compatible to teach English. Thus, if English is taught in after school activity, they can hire a specialist teacher. In addition, Principal 3 shares his experience of facing a

problem when they had a specialist English teacher, the teacher decided to resign from school due to his academic qualification. A teacher with an English Education bachelor's degree is not considered to be linear with the academic qualification of an elementary school teacher. According to the Regulation of Minister of Education and Culture No. 16, 2019, teachers certified educators in English can be classroom teachers as long as they have an academic qualification in Elementary School Teacher Education (S-1/D-4 PGSD) or psychology. It means that the English teachers of elementary school are not English Education bachelors. Meanwhile, not all elementary schools have English certified teachers. Therefore, Principal 1 assumes that English teaching should be taught after school.

On the other hand, 7 Principals believe that in the case of English is taught after school or it is excluded from the curriculum, many students will not be motivated or interested in learning English as it is not a compulsory subject while English is needed by today's young learners.

It can be concluded that English teaching at elementary school still becomes polemic for the schools and the teachers.

English teaching as a media for introducing foreign language and culture to students

Based on the data, there are 79 teachers (79%) agree that English can give broader knowledge to students about foreign language and foreign culture to the students. As stated by Violette-Irene (2013), by learning English, students are introduced to foreign languages and cultures different from their languages and cultures. Furthermore, at the elementary school level, teachers may use a song to teach English to the students. Through songs, students can learn the language and culture of English native speakers (Yamin, 2017). Thus, students will have broader knowledge about cross-cultural understanding that leads them to connect with different cultures beyond their own country (Sepyanda, 2017).

The advantages of learning English at young age

Learning foreign languages at young ages can give some advantages. Students of elementary school-aged between 6-12 years old are categorized as young learners (Suyanto, 2010). According to the survey result, 72 teachers (72%) assume that the elementary school period is the best time for learning a foreign language. Learning English at this period can give more opportunities to engage with the culture where the language comes from. Furthermore, they get more chances to learn English (Violetta-Irene, 2013). Moreover, 55 teachers (55%) disagree if elementary school students are considered to be unable for

accepting the English subject. 30% of the teachers are neutral while 15 % of them agree that elementary school students are not ready for accepting the English subject. In conclusion, learning English at an early age is beneficial for the students. Also, they are in the period of full of curiosity that can make them learn new knowledge easier (Anjarwati, 2015)

Promoting Nationalism in English Teaching

There are some assumptions about teaching English at elementary school that can omit students' nationalism. Thus, this survey involves some questions about the relationship between students' nationalism and their English learning from the teachers' point of view. The result reveals that 84% of the teachers disagree that learning English can lessen students' nationalism, 8 % of them say neutral while the rest of them (8%) agree that learning English can lessen students' nationalism. From this result, we can see that most of the teachers believe that there is no correlation between students' English learning and students' nationalism. Moreover, 88 teachers (88%) think that learning English will not hamper students' Indonesian language learning. However, 54 teachers (54%) agree that learning the Indonesian language and culture is more necessary than learning English for students in elementary school. 28 teachers (28%) disagree with the statement while 18 teachers (18%) are neutral. It means that many teachers assume that learning the Indonesian language and culture should be the priority before students learn other languages and cultures. Anjarwati (2015) suggests that teachers provide English materials that involve cultures such as Indonesian legend, songs, and games. In line with Anjarwati, Fanani (2015) recommend that teacher can apply internationalization of nationalism in English materials and use Indonesian songs for teaching. Thus, students are encouraged to learn English as well as Indonesian cultures. Furthermore, he assures that there is no evidence that English learning can lessen students' nationalism.

English Teachers Competence

Many elementary schools do not have specialist English teachers. The principals decide to demand classroom teachers to teach English. The teachers may face some obstacles during teaching English because English teaching is not their specialty. According to the result of the survey, 89% of the teachers agree that English at elementary school should be taught by English specialist teachers, 6 teachers are neutral and 5 teachers do not agree with the idea. 96% of them believe that English specialist teachers can provide appropriate materials to the students, while the rest of the respondents are neutral. Besides, 92 teachers (92%) think that English specialist teachers can provide appropriate teaching media and methods better than

classroom teachers can do. 7% of them disagree and 1% of them are neutral. From these findings, it can be concluded that most of them are not confident of their English teaching competence and assume that English specialist teachers will do better in teaching English. It is confirmed that 66% of the teachers confess that the main obstacle to teaching English is their speaking skills. Meanwhile, English teachers of elementary school should have good speaking skills because their students will listen to what they say and imitate it (Harmer, 2007). Therefore, English teachers should own professional competence in which they are required to master their specialty including providing teaching materials and capable to deliver them to their students by using appropriate teaching methods (Suherdi, 2013).

There are 35 teachers (35%) who disagree that English at elementary school can be taught by classroom teachers with low English proficiency, 34 teachers are neutral, and 31 teachers agree with the statement. This result indicates that 34 teachers doubt English teachers for the students as most of them do not have English teachers as a result they have to teach English. It is in line with research conducted by Sudrajat (2015) that finds most of the elementary school English teachers have low pedagogical competence.

The last question of the survey is about teacher training. There are 75% of the teachers agree that elementary school teachers should get English teaching training, 21 teachers are neutral, and the rest (4%) disagree. Okumura (2017) states that classroom teachers need to get a teacher development program that can facilitate them to improve their English teaching proficiency. Unfortunately, English excludes from the 2013 Curriculum. Yet, if government include English in the elementary school curriculum, it is better to determine some regulation about English teachers' qualification.

Schools' Policy on the Implementation of English Teaching

Interviews with 11 principals of elementary school were conducted to obtain data about their policy on the implementation of English teaching. The interviews were conducted in the Indonesian language. The questions include the school policy on teaching English and the obstacles that they face in the implementation of English teaching.

From the interview, there are four schools that still implement English teaching. Principal 3, principal 4, principal 6, and principal 9 believe that English is needed by their students as it is an international language although it is not stated in the 2013 Curriculum. English teaching is conducted during the lesson hours and they have a special certificate for students because English excludes from students' grade book reports. Meanwhile, the other principals decided

not to implement English teaching because it is not a local content or compulsory subject in the elementary school curriculum. Moreover, they do not have a special English teacher. As stated by Dewi (2014) that English subject does not have a clear position in the 2013 curriculum. It is not mentioned explicitly as a compulsory subject, a local content subject, or an extracurricular.

However, except principal 1, all the principals agree if English is important and needed by students of elementary school. On the other hand, Principal 1 assumes that the students are not ready to learn English yet. It is better for them to learn the Indonesian language and their mother tongue at elementary school. In terms of the obstacles that school and the teachers face, most of them say that the main problem is the availability of English teachers. The classroom teachers cannot teach English as well as specialist English teachers can do. They have a lack of English proficiency. It is similar to the finding of a study conducted by Sudrajat (2015), the implementation of English teaching in Tenggara was poor due to the teachers' low English teaching proficiency. Principal 8 and principal 10 think that if they hire an English teacher, they need more budget for paying the teacher and their schools cannot afford it. Most of the principals hope that government will include English in the next curriculum because, in this globalization era, the young generation needs to learn English as it is an international language. In addition, they hope the government can facilitate them with English specialist teachers or make some regulations for English teaching qualification.

CONCLUSION

Considering the data analysis result, it can be inferred that teachers assume that English is needed by elementary school students. English learning is not a factor that can reduce students' sense of nationalism. Most of the teachers also think that it is better for the students to learn English at a young age so that they can get more time to learn English. However, most of them are not confident to teach English and believe that specialist English teachers will be able to teach English better than they do. In terms of the school policy, there are four schools of 11 schools that still implement English teaching because of their assumption about the importance of English in the globalization era while the rest of the schools decide not to teach English because of the curriculum mandate. The main problem of the implementation of English teaching is the availability of English specialist teachers. Yet, they hope the government will include English in the next curriculum and facilitate them with an English specialist teacher.

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