The Ambivalences of English Lessons Existing in Indonesian Primary Schools

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Abstract: *This article discusses policies governing the English curriculum in Indonesian primary schools. English, as local content or as an extracurricular subject delegated to each school, creates inequality in primary school education as some primary schools offer English learning and many do not, for various reasons such as a lack of qualified human resources at TEYL, or insufficient facilities. This ambivalence eventually creates problems at the primary education level, including a lack of clarity regarding careers for English teachers in primary schools. This results in a limit on the number of tertiary institutions that provide English-teaching education for EYL, so that primary schools in turn employ classroom teachers who have no credentials to teach English in the classroom. This ambivalence would not have occurred if the government had made a firm decision on the existence of English as a subject in Indonesian primary schools. Therefore, the authors of this article make an argument for the importance of mastering English as an international language (EIL) for young learners in non-English-speaking countries, especially in this era of rapid technological development. This article suggests that the government should immediately establish a clear policy regarding the status of English as a primary school subject, and that the curriculum policy in primary schools should no longer designate English as a local content or extracurricular subject, but rather as a compulsory subject which automatically adjusts learning outcomes based on student demographic characteristics. The implication of this article is that English lessons can be taught to all young learners through an eclectic approach.*

Keywords: *English as an international language; Government policy; Indonesian setting; teaching English to young learners*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English to young learners continues to be an interesting topic to discuss as a research theme in the field of education. Many studies in non-English countries discuss how teachers teach English as an international language (EIL) (Kumaravadivelu in McKay et al., 2012; Marlina, 2014, 2018; Rose et al., 2020). In addition, some focus on researching from the student's point of view how young learners learn English as a target language (Asmali, 2017; Nguyen, 2021). In several countries in Asia, such as Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines, teaching English to young learners is not a matter of debate any longer (Rahim & Chun, 2017; Ahmad & Abd Samad, 2018; McKay et al., 2012; Barrot, 2019; Bland, 2019; Kirkpatrick et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2017). The condition of education in these countries is known to be more advanced, especially in mastering English, since English is employed as a second language. Several articles report that the importance of learning English as an international language (EIL) has grown in non-English countries that see English as a

foreign language in the Asian context, such as Korea, Japan, Saudi Arabia, China, and Indonesia (Cao & Wei, 2019; Chao et al., 2014; Cianflone, 2014; Hassall, 2001; McKay, 2003; Widodo et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2020; Wolfgang, 1987) However, the policy regarding English learning at all levels of education is still subject to the autonomy of each country. Even though English is an international language, some countries still impose restrictions on English lessons within the educational curriculum. In Indonesia, the existence of English lessons in primary schools is not a compulsory subject but is recognised as a local content lesson, with sometimes only a few hours allocated to schools (Salim & Hanif, 2021; Sulistiyo et al., 2020). While primary schools in the big cities provide English lessons as a favourite compulsory extracurricular activity for their students, schools in rural areas provide English lessons to their students for only one hour a week, with even this allocation provided only to fill free school hours. This imbalance in implementation in primary schools is related to government policies.

Since the early 1990s, English as a foreign language has become a concern in Indonesia, particularly in the area of basic education. This has been the result of a growing awareness of the importance of learning English as early as possible in order to participate and compete in an increasingly modern and globalised world. That awareness prompted the government to adopt a policy – Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (Depdikbud RI) No. 0487/1992, Chapter VIII – stating that primary schools can include English subjects in their curriculum. This policy underpins the implementation of English lessons as a local content subject in Indonesian primary schools (Faridatuunnisa, 2020). For the next few years, the policy for implementing English lessons in primary schools followed the rules set out in the 1994 curriculum, which includes lessons on local content that follow regional conditions and environmental needs. Each school can determine its policy for managing several subjects, including English. The 2013 curriculum, on the other hand, does not recommend that English be offered in primary schools (Maili, 2018; Rintaningrum, 2015; Zein, 2017; Zokaee et al., 2020). The implementation of English subjects is submitted to each school in the area as an extracurricular activity (Maili, 2018). One of the reasons for the government issuing this policy was the enthusiasm of students for learning English, which was higher than for their lessons in mother tongues, Indonesian, Bahasa and local languages. The government's apprehension about this phenomenon would become a separate educational concern for them, so that in the 2013 curriculum, the government issued a policy of thematic subjects mandatory for primary school students. These were conceived to foster a sense of love for the country, and to get young people to know better their mother tongues (Bahasa and local languages).

AMBIVALENCE IN IMPLEMENTING ENGLISH LESSON IN INDONESIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

After a decade of implementing the 2013 curriculum in Indonesia, a new phenomenon has emerged where technology in the field of education is developing very rapidly, and this emphasises students' mastery of English as an international language (Lou & Noels, 2019). Multiple access to knowledge and communication networks tends to lead to the use of English. While the existing curriculum policy does not clearly cover learning English, changes regarding technological advances add to ambivalence over the implementation of English learning in primary schools.

First, this change ultimately leaves primary schools unsure whether or not English lessons should be implemented. Schools with high-quality and managerial resources do not hesitate to apply English learning at all class levels. However, this is not the case for schools that lack both. This most emphatically would not have occurred if English had been a mandatory lesson in elementary schools from the beginning, as it is today. Naturally, all schools would be better prepared to develop qualified teachers and a strong curriculum. Second, educational institutions hold numerous competitions at the regional, national, and even international levels to assess students' proficiency in using English at elementary school level; these include storytelling and speech competitions. Obviously, students participating in the competition must be proficient in English, and to develop such students, it is necessary to have teaching assistants skilled in teaching English to students. Unfortunately, teachers with robust English-teaching abilities are scarce in primary schools that follow a well-defined curriculum for implementing English lessons in their classrooms (Graves & Garton, 2017; Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017). Thirdly, since English lessons are not mandatory in primary schools, universities providing teaching candidates are also severely limited in their preparation of teachers for young learners, as all parties recognise that there is no clear career path as an English teacher for young learners. Finally, the government's policy regarding English instruction in elementary schools in the 2013 curriculum, which prioritises the introduction of Indonesian and local languages, does not appear to be consistent with the rapid development of the modern era, in which information technology is widely accessible to everyone, even those living in remote areas. This prompted rural primary schools that previously did not offer English classes to reintroduce them, despite their limited facilities and resources. Regrettably, English is taught by teachers who have little or no qualification for English education.

In his speech, the Indonesian Minister of Education, Nadim Makarim, said that he would revive English lessons in primary schools (https://www.medcom.id/pendidikan/news-pendidikan/1bVjrxXb-nadiem-beri-sinyal-hidupkan-kembali-bahasa-inggris-di-sd). The Indonesian Ministry of Education plan to revive English lessons in Indonesia has received positive reactions among English educators, even at the rural level. They agreed because they considered English language education from an early age to be future capital in the nation's ability to compete in the international arena (Fajriah, 2019; Hawanti, 2014; Susanti & Prameswari, 2020). However, the Government still has to do its homework in changing the policies that have been running so far.

Therefore, this article discusses whether government policies are still needed to revive English learning at the primary school level in Indonesia. If they are, what reasons should the government use as a basis for making this policy change? What firm decisions should the Indonesian government make regarding English lessons at the primary school level in Indonesia? Among various studies conducted thus far, no one claims that teaching English to young learners is a bad thing or a waste of time; all researchers agree, based on their findings, that mastery of English as an international language should be provided for students from an early age (Astutik et al., 2019; Adisti, 2018; Cahyati & Madya, 2019; Meisani & Musthafa, 2019; Moon, 2005; Napitupulu & Shinoda, 2014; Taghizadeh & Yourdshahi, 2020; Widodo, 2016; Zein, 2017; Nababan, 1991; Farouk & Swanto, 2020; Somerville, 2019).

POSSIBLE REASONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO REVIVE ENGLISH LEARNING IN INDONESIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

English should be introduced as an international language from the golden age

The 2013 primary school curriculum policy was enough to amaze English academics, practitioners, and teachers; this is a concern among English teachers in primary schools – even prospective English teachers still studying in this field felt anxious at the time (Fajriah, 2019; Hawanti, 2014; Maili, 2018; Sukirman, 2016; Susanti & Prameswari, 2020). Although English subjects were not eliminated, policies that left the application of English subjects to each school created a new problem, with increasingly high disparities in the quality of education and primary school graduates in Indonesia. Moreover, the problem is even more complex because many secondary schools accept students only from among qualified graduates of primary schools that make English a leading local content subject. Another source of reluctance to teach English to primary school-age children is the assumption that they will experience speech delays if they have to be taught two or more languages (https://lifestyle.okezone.com/read/2018/07/30/196/1929283/belajar-bahasa-asing-terlalu-dini-sebabkan-anak-telat-bicara). However, this issue requires concrete and empirical evidence from research that does not yet exist.

Instead, some researchers offer various methods of teaching English to young learners at the primary school level. As in the case study research conducted by Westhisi (2020), which uses the phonic method with children who experience speech delays in learning English. The results of Westhisi's research show that a child can pronounce words, and that interaction with peers encourages children to be competitive and enthusiastic. Another study, by Khan et al. (2020), finds obstacles to learning English as a foreign language in rural areas, such as an environment that does not support them in mastering the target language, shallow English learning standards, minimal facilities, and low quality of English teachers because there is no standard of selection to become English teachers. Addressing these problems, Khan et al. (2020) suggest that the government of Bangladesh should take the initiative and make year-round lesson plans for English teachers, and incorporate practical activities into the basic level syllabus, in order to further improve English education. If not, then the government must ensure proper education in a densely populated country like Bangladesh. In this case, the government can engage national and international teacher educators to provide a set of systematic learning plans that support English language learning.

Governments in non-English-speaking countries can see how English proficiency benefits children, based on existing research. Additionally, English is a tool for overcoming communication barriers, particularly when dealing with foreigners, where communication can take place freely because English is an international language. Thus, learning English from childhood is critical because the child's brain is still plastic and malleable, making it easier to accept information than it is when he or she has to learn a foreign language in adulthood (Giannakopoulou et al., 2013; Li & Jeong, 2020; Thadphoothon, 2019). According to Moon (2005) parents choose to have their children begin learning English at a young age because they enthusiastically

believe that learning English is a cool and modern activity, but they are unaware of the benefits that will accrue if their child begins learning English at a young age. Moon (2005) provides several reasons why learning English as a foreign language is easier for children in her article.

Younger is preferable

The term "early acquisition of a foreign language" refers to the hypothesis that there is a distinct period of language learning during childhood, and that once that period has passed, a person will have difficulty picking up a language (Jaekel et al., 2017). This theory is contentious, particularly when it comes to foreign language learning, as there is also evidence that adolescents and adults can acquire foreign languages more quickly and efficiently than children, particularly when it comes to grammar (Mclaughlin, 1992). Children, on the other hand, have a natural sensitivity to pronunciation, though they will be unable to employ this instinct if the teacher is not fluent in a foreign language. As a result, teaching English requires excellent and qualified instructors.

In the long run, youth is preferable

The second reason is that learning foreign languages at a young age benefits children in the long run. Children who begin learning English in elementary school will have more time to study and, in the long run, will achieve a higher level of proficiency than those who procrastinate (Moon, 2005). There is evidence to support this position, but it stems from both natural and unnatural language learning situations for children. In situations where students are learning a foreign language in school, exposure alone may not be sufficient to reap the benefits.

English is the international language

The third reason is related to English's global importance, but this is irrelevant to primary school children and does not imply any necessity to begin English early. English as an international language (EIL), on the other hand, is a more appropriate paradigm for expressing this viewpoint, as English has been used by non-native speakers in a variety of countries with diverse cultures and economic backgrounds. This is consistent with the assertion of Marlina (2014) that the EIL paradigm recognises the international function of English and its use in a variety of cultural and economic arenas by English speakers from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds who speak another mother tongue. Sharifian argues (in Marlina, 2014) that the paradigm of EIL is obsolete, and rejects the idea of a variety of English serving as an international communication medium. "English, in its plural form, is the language of international and intercultural communication".

As an international language, English is also taught in primary schools in some non-English-speaking countries. This is demonstrated in research on English language learning for young learners in a variety of countries. Covering the last seven years, the authors of this article used a random search method from the journal *Scopus*. The authors chose seven years due to the changes set out in the 2013 curriculum, which

allowed them to observe trends, particularly in Indonesia. Then they used Vosviewers software to discover a cross-border research network that examines primary school students' learning of English as an international language.
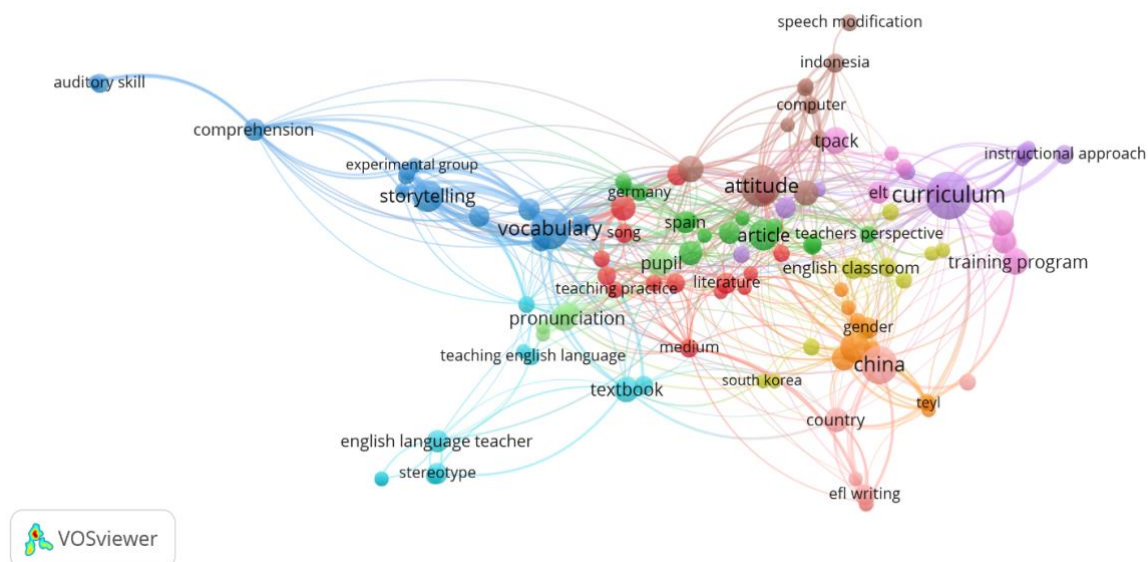

Figure 1. *Network visualisation of the distribution of research that discusses the English curriculum in primary schools from several non-English-speaking countries*

Figure 1 shows that the English learning curriculum for students is the dominant theme networked among non-English-speaking countries such as China, Indonesia, South Korea, Spain, and Germany. Even though these countries share the same keywords about curriculum, researchers from these different countries have different focuses of study. Research in China, for example, links discussions on language-learning curricula for children with gender, training programmes, and teachers' perspectives on teaching English. It also focuses on discussing TEYL, which networks with other non-English-speaking countries such as South Korea, but the keywords suggest that the two countries do not discuss much of the curriculum in learning English for children. Research in Indonesia on teaching English to children shows that research tends to discuss curricula related to technology, attitudes, and teaching English itself. However, from the network visualisation, it seems that the condition of the English curriculum at primary school level is rarely discussed. This is ironic; although many studies discuss the importance for students of mastering English, the condition of curriculum policies is not yet clear. The work of these researchers can be used as a study of the importance of the existence of English at primary school level in Indonesia, and as a basis for studies by related parties. In other countries, such as Spain and Germany, research on learning English has focused more on learning content such as vocabulary and pronunciation. Besides, researchers in both countries tend to discuss media and literary works, including storytelling and songs, rather than discussing the curriculum itself. This shows that in both countries the English language learning curriculum for students is no longer a problem because it is likely that English has been used as a subject at all levels of education in the country.

Discussions about the importance of children learning English as an international language cannot be separated from how and what they are taught. The method, approach, or strategy for teaching English to young learners is also a point of contention. The quality of educators has a significant impact on children's ability to master the target language. Even if educators have mastered the content or teaching materials and have access to effective learning media, mastering English teaching in the classroom is a critical issue. As a result, educators must also understand how to employ the appropriate methodology.

METHODOLOGY FOR TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS IN NON-ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

Renandya and Widodo (2016) describe several global trends in English teaching and learning in their book. To begin with, English has undergone dramatic changes in terms of usage and pronunciation. Second, the way English is studied and taught globally has shifted. The pursuit of the best or most effective teaching methods is no longer a priority. Additionally, the growing use of digital technology in classrooms has altered how English is taught and learnt. Finally, at the policy level, significant changes in the way English is used and taught have been implemented (and recently). Similarly, in teaching English to children and adolescents, methods, approaches, and strategies cannot be fixed on a single type of method/approach/strategy that is the most recent or the best.

According to Brown and Lee (2015), there is no cutting-edge methodology for teaching English. They believe that language teaching methods must be adapted to the student's circumstances and characteristics. Naturally, students who attend international schools in major cities differ from those who attend rural schools. Apart from their disparate demographic characteristics, they also have disparate educational institutions. As a result, an eclectic approach is the most appropriate method to use in the postmodern era. With such an approach, teachers can select from a variety of methods and combine them according to the course objectives and the learners' abilities. The eclectic approach establishes a link between the classroom experience and students' daily lives. This enables students to make sense of new knowledge by drawing on prior knowledge. Thus, learning foreign languages is not strange for them because they are acquiring knowledge about something they find familiar.

Figure 2. *The words frequency of the eclectic approach research in TEYL*

The results of word frequency analysis performed by NVIVO 12 software on over 30 articles indexed by Google Scholar over the last five years (2016-2021) regarding the eclectic approach or method of English learning for young learners are depicted in Figure 2. The visual representation of word frequency reveals that the terms eclectic, English, students, teaching, and learning are predominant. This means that the eclectic method of English learning for students remains an intriguing topic for research, to add to research that focuses on specific methods.

Then, how can educators differentiate their methods of teaching English? Brown and Lee (2015) divide language teaching in the 20th century into three segments, dubbed "The changing winds and shifting sands." The era of the "designer" method, the "early" years, and the dawn of a new era are represented by these three sections. Brown and Lee (2015) then discuss the various methods of language learning that developed during these three distinct eras.

Figure 3. *Language teaching methods (Adapted from Brown & Lee, 2015)*

There is no one best method for teaching a foreign language. However, English language teaching (ELT) educators and practitioners all over the world engage in a wide range of activities in order to keep up and improve their practice. The authors of this article elaborate on the various methods presented by Brown and Lee (2015) in Figure 3, emphasising that young learner teachers can use an eclectic approach with these methods.

Grammar translation methods

The grammar translation method, formerly known as the 'classical method', emphasises memorizing grammar rules, vocabulary, text translation, and written exercises (Brown & Lee, 2015). This method uses a deductive approach that emphasises formation and application.

Direct method

Maximilian Berlitz argues that additional language learning should be more like learning your first language, based on a naturalistic approach to language teaching (Brown & Lee, 2015). It is important in the live process to use lots of spoken contact, not to use translation between L1 and L2, and not to waste time learning grammar.

Audio-lingual method (ALM)

To learn oral skills, the audio-lingual approach borrows basic elements of the direct method to emphasise oral skills over reading and writing (Brown & Lee, 2015). It focuses on behavioural, linguistic, and linguistic theories, was psychological in its time, and was seen as a part-to-whole approach. To develop oral skills, the audio-lingual approach uses pronunciation exercises, pattern exercises, and exercises in simple conservation.

Community language learning (CLL)

After a shift in thinking about a more student-centred approach that focused on the learner rather than the instructor, community language learning was born (Brown & Lee, 2015). Curran views her students as a group of learners who value social experiences in the classroom. Relationship building, the ability to learn, physical responses, and students' emotions are all given more attention (Larsen & Freeman, 2000).

Suggestopedia

The suggestopedia (or desuggestopedia) method is based on the premise that the human brain can absorb a large amount of knowledge under appropriate learning conditions, such as stimulation and giving strength to teachers (Brown & Lee, 2015). Suggestopedia is characterised as an affective-humanistic approach that values students' emotions (Larsen & Freeman, 2000).

Silent way

Silent mode is a language learning technique that focuses on the premise that teachers should be as quiet as possible during teaching, while students should be allowed to speak as much as possible (Brown & Lee, 2015). There are three basic

concepts to follow: the learner must explore or create; learning is assisted by the use of physical objects; learning is assisted by using the target language to solve problems.

Total physical response

The total physical response method arises from the belief in the learning trail theory, which states that stimulating or tracing memory improves it (Brown & Lee, 2015). Furthermore, the total physical response method includes elements of children's language development, such as the fact that children learning other languages listen before speaking and that listening to them is accompanied by physical responses, such as moving, touching, running, or staring.

In line with Brown and Lee (2015), Karn (2007) describes the global trend towards ELT. He concurs with Brown and Lee that there is no such thing as a good English teaching approach, because the future is so uncertain. Nonetheless, no one can prevent educators from making predictions about the future. This requires teachers to be flexible and adaptable to all changes. For example, they transition from simplicity to complexity, from uniformity to diversity, and from traditional to modern ways of teaching. Karn (2007) states in his article that ELT practitioners worldwide have followed a variety of trends, depending on resource availability, context, and needs. He adds that English language educators have access to a variety of language teaching approaches that are occasionally presented by professionals. Regrettably, some English educators are very harsh and adhere to extremely severe techniques or methods. Indeed, they can follow certain trends based on their pupils' features, and the location and conditions of learning in terms of cultural and demographic differences, as well as the advancement of the times, which cannot be separated from technology. Thus, English educators can teach using a variety of academic and professional trends. According to Karn (2007), the following are some contemporary developments in ELT (Figure 4).
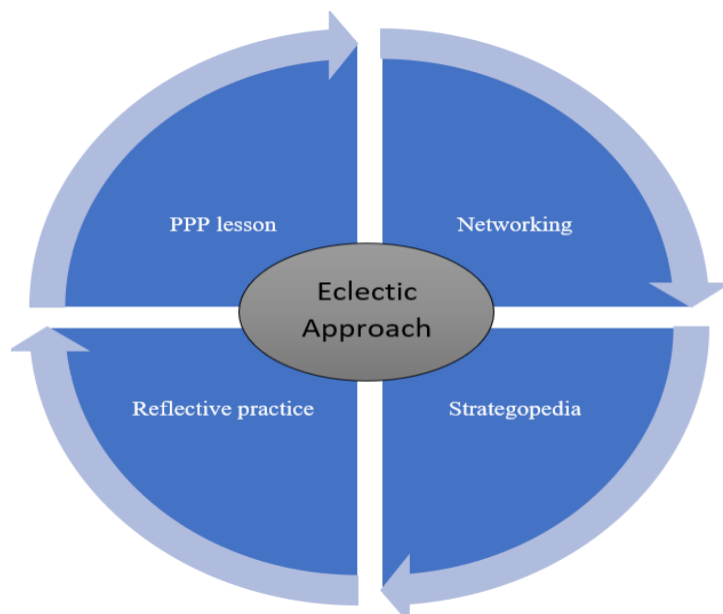

Figure 4. *Modern trends in ELT (Adapted from Karn, 2007)*

PPP lesson

In presentation, practice, and production (PPP) lessons, the teacher first contextualises new language items, then instructs the students to put the information into practice through controlled exercise activities. Typically, practice is conducted in pairs or small groups. Lastly, the teacher encourages students to engage in less structured activities in a communicative way (Bui & Newton, 2021; Karn, 2007).

Networking

With internet facilities and e-communication networks, it is possible for English teachers to enrich their teaching methods not only offline but also online. Networks also frees teachers from reliance on theories and methods dictated by teaching methodologists. E-communication and other online activities are growing rapidly, which has allowed educators to be independent of knowledge generated by 'experts' in other contexts, and of the authority of published books, implying that learning is now highly flexible. Even within an existing network, the teacher can teach English to young learners with fun gamification and various applications such as Kahoot, Vocaroo, Canva, and other apps (Karn, 2007; Sun et al., 2017).

Strategopedia

Today's tendency in ELT is for students to be self-directed learners. New schools of thought are aimed at equipping students with the necessary learning skills to assume this self-direction. They are instructed in the use of learning strategies in order to maximise their learning efficacy, and they acquire the ability to learn. Cooperative and multiple acquisition intelligence gives students a lot of different ways to learn a new language (Bala & Bala, 2018; Karn, 2007).

Reflective practice

This is a method by which teachers reflect on and examine their own teaching practices. It employs a kind of systematic personal interest in what lies beyond one's current knowledge and practice, about how one might do something different or even better. The basic premise of reflection is that a teacher learns about himself or herself and how to improve his or her teaching by attempting to observe and understand what occurs during the teaching process in class, and then reflects on his or her own successes and shortcomings. Following that, teachers can experiment with something new in order to maintain what is considered successful, and improve what is considered as lacking in his or her teaching (Karn, 2007).

Teaching English to young students as an international language is undeniably an interesting phenomenon, especially in Indonesia. In recent years, curriculum policies have shifted slightly due to technological developments. Therefore, adjustments are needed in dealing with existing phenomena. The method offered by Brown & Lee (2015) and approach proposed by Karn (2007) are not necessarily abandoned, but applying them while adjusting the condition and character of students is the right path. With an eclectic approach in this era of post-methods, language educators can be more adaptive in teaching English as an international language. Besides, English teaching can be more creative through using technology and implementing the methods offered by Brown and Lee (2015).

THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD ESTABLISH A CLEAR POLICY REGARDING ENGLISH INSTRUCTION IN INDONESIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The evolution of new phenomena and technological advancements to date should serve as a basis for government decision-makers to be more assertive in determining policies. Concern about Indonesia's young generation developing a lack of national spirit as a result of English instruction is not a reason to make English instruction in primary schools an ambiguous subject. By employing the appropriate instructional methods, young students will certainly be able to master English as an international language without having to abandon their culture as Indonesian citizens. Students who have mastered the English language in primary school are better prepared to accept higher-level English instruction in secondary school. English is currently a compulsory subject in Indonesia, beginning in secondary schools. This makes it more difficult for primary students who learn English to lag behind primary students who make English an extracurricular subject, or a primary source of content in their home country. According to reports from various sources previously discussed, students' mastery of English should not be delayed in order that they learn more about their own country's culture than they absorb about a foreign language (English). The introduction of English as a subject in primary schools has become a global issue as a result of English's growing importance among an association of global and international languages and its inclusion in school curricula (Lestariyana & Widodo, 2018; Sulistiyo et al., 2020; Wedell & Alshumaimeri, 2014; Widodo, 2016; Widodo et al., 2017). The objectives of learning English as an international language can be accomplished through the use of English learning methods that are demographically appropriate for students.

As a result, the authors of this article concur that children should begin learning English in primary school. It is necessary to emphasise the curriculum policy in Indonesia regarding the presence of English for primary students. English in primary schools does not require reintroduction, because this subject is not dormant. However, the government should immediately establish a firm policy ensuring that English learning is given the same priority in primary schools throughout Indonesia, so that teachers and students are better prepared to implement English learning through facilities, references, teacher resources, and learning media. This means that the government should make English a mandatory subject in Indonesian primary schools, removing it from the list of optional subjects. The authors' argument is supported by research conducted by Sulistiyo et al., (2020) on policy recommendations that describe the presence of English in primary schools in Indonesia, where the government policy regarding the application of English language learning delivered to each school creates new problems. For instance, learning facilities, the quality of English teachers, teaching resources, and even the curriculum itself, are unevenly implemented, resulting in social disparities in the community.

Sulistiyo et al.'s research findings from interviews with six English teachers in primary schools indicate that teachers disagree with English lessons being transformed into lessons on local content. First, they argue that English is allocated only a few hours, which falls short of student requirements in learning English as an international language. Thus, English lessons must have a defined place in the Indonesian curriculum so that schools can implement learning effectively. Second, teachers believe that English lessons in primary schools serve as a bridge for students to be able to learn

English at the secondary school level, which is, by definition, more difficult. Thirdly, teachers believe that when students learn English in primary school, they can become bilingual or multilingual, as well as competent in Indonesian and in their regional language. Teachers believe that, at that age, children can master a new language more quickly. This belief is based on their experience as English teachers for young students in primary schools (2020).

The clarity of the position of English lessons has become critical. Like it or not, the admission of English as an international language encourages all elements of society to know or at least understand the importance of English as a global language. The government also should immediately provide a policy that is unambiguous. If the government determines English to be a compulsory subject at primary school level, several benefits will be felt by many parties (Cahyati & Madya, 2019). First, from the students' point of view, they will master English as an international language more quickly, providing longer-lasting benefits for their future. Jaekel et al. (2017) state in their research that the earlier foreign language learning begins, the better the results. Second, with regard to parents who are no longer in a state of hesitation; a clear policy with English is a compulsory subject will optimise the support of parents in facilitating their children to learn languages. Furthermore, the school will also prepare facilities and reference sources for learning English, and of course they will prepare qualified English teachers. Finally, from the viewpoint of the higher education sector – especially among those that produce prospective English teachers – institutions will focus not only on producing graduates to become English teachers for secondary schools, but also on prospective teachers to teach English to young students. In the end, prospective teachers among education graduates will have many job opportunities and embrace professionalism as English teachers, not only at the secondary school level but also at the primary school level.

CONCLUSION

In short, this article can be concluded with the general observation that the existence of English learning at primary school level in Indonesia is currently still weak due to ambivalent curriculum policies. Not all primary schools implement English learning, which widens the gap between students obtaining an education in English as an international language. Various theories have been put forward by experts and researchers which state that English in non-English-speaking countries is something that needs to be known and mastered in preparation for future global competition. Thus, the curriculum policy regarding English teaching in primary schools in Indonesia should be that it becomes a compulsory subject, and this should be implemented immediately by the government. Hence, the clarity of the presence of English in primary schools will strengthen its application in each school, both in cities and in rural areas. The authors of this article realise that this article still has many weaknesses, such as the analysis and theoretical basis used. Therefore, they suggest that the next writer or researcher conducts a similar exercise using the theory and foundation of the latest studies, more relevant to the development of the existing curriculum. Future research can also focus on empirical studies of curriculum policies in non-English-speaking countries, particularly regarding English instruction in primary schools. The importance of mastering English as an international language cannot be delayed, as technological advancements are lightning-fast in this digital age. As a result, English proficiency should be pursued from a young age.

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