

From Policy to Classroom: Where do the Teachers Stand?

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Abstract: Introducing English as a local content for young learners has been an interesting debatable issue for years. The issue is that about the various teaching practises that mostly considered as *improper*. It does not mean that the teachers are not capable to teach but rather to the misinterpretation of the policy that leads to improper teaching practice. Having experienced at 3 different subdistricts of Kudus conducting workshop on TEYL, it is suspected that there is a missing line from policy to classroom. In fact, most of the teachers seem not have sufficient knowledge about the policy. Limited sources and imperfect syllabus also give contribution to *improper* teaching practice. They themselves interpret the policy, make syllabus, develop material, and teach use their own way. Concerning to that problem, this paper will investigate how well the teachers understand the policy and how they teach in classroom. Questionnaire is used to generate the data. The questionnaires sheet are distributed to teachers of English at Elementary School in 9 sub districts of Kudus randomly. As the data has been being analyzed, the conclusion cannot be drawn to avoid premature findings. Further, the result of this study is expected to bring about change to the teaching practice of EYL in Kudus particularly.

Keywords: *English as a local content, English teacher, teaching practice.*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Teaching English for young learners in Indonesia has been regulated through a policy that is Decree of Culture and Education Minister No. 060/U/1993 on 25 February 1993 about the possibility of including English as a local content in Elementary school that can be given to grade four to six. Because of that policy, nowadays almost all of schools either private or state schools include English as a local content. For those that have good resources seem to be ready in preparing things that are needed such as the syllabus, the English teacher, etc. On the other hand, schools with insufficient resources such as fund, books, and facilities, they probably not intensively provide things needed to support this subject. It is understandable since condition and orientation of each school is absolutely different, but it has to be realized that actually the students' need are exactly the same. They need to be taught based on their psychology development including in English subject. Of course they do not know about this sort of thing. It is then the responsibility of a certain school (i.e teacher) to fulfill this right that is to teach them properly by considering the policy and their need of using language that is related to psychology development. It is very important since English is a foreign language that is introduced as a local content, not a compulsory subject.

Dealing with the policy, in fact many English teachers of Elementary Schools seem not understand well the policy about teaching English as a local content. To be specific, from the observation in 3 sub districts of Kudus, it is known that they do not know well about the curriculum, the syllabus, and the material that should be taught to the students. Because of

that, they just use local book provided by the local government (*Pemkab*) or students' worksheet (*Lembar Kerja Siswa*) published by a particular publisher that has been recommended by local *Unit of Education Institution (Unit Pelaksana Teknis Dinas Pendidikan)*. Looking at the materials provided, there is a *worry* and a *sorry* since most of them are not really appropriate with the curriculum and the students' need that is a need of using English as a means of communication.

The material is too complicated to be delivered to the students at their age. Most of them are focused on grammar and vocabulary that are given in incommunicative way. On the contrary, the standard competency requires the students to perform the language orally (*speaking*) that emphasize to the use of English in daily communication. Many teachers even follow all of the instructions from page to page of the book or the students' worksheet. Those are reasons why we have to be worry and sorry to see such a condition.

Ideally, the policy has to be understood well by the English teachers in order that they keep in the right path in teaching English for young learners as a foreign language. The teachers are those that should understand the policy and those that master the paradigm of teaching English for young learners. They have to realize this since they are the key to the success of teaching English for early age students. Because of that, teachers are expected to teach the students properly by using communicative ways by considering the current policy and the students' psychology development. The way they teach is very important as English is a new thing and substantially it is only a supplementary. Hence the portion should not be overlapped and the expected achievement should not be high.

As illustrated in the previous, this study is aimed at investigating where the teachers stand between the policy and the classroom. In other words, it elaborates what the role of teachers as the agent of action that bridges the two things. Since teachers are in the middle of those, it is important to know their roles in teaching English for young learners. Furthermore, it investigates how far the teachers understand the policy and how they teach English for their early age students. After knowing those two important things, this study will give some recommendations related to the findings that hopefully will bring about change to the teaching practices of English for young learners.

Research Questions

In this study, there are two questions formulated:

1. How do English teachers of Elementary School understand the policy of TEYL as a local content in Elementary School?
2. What teaching practices are done by the English teachers of Elementary School?

Objectives of the Study

In line with the research questions, this recent study is aimed at investigating what the teachers' role in teaching English to young learners. It also elaborates how well the Elementary English teachers understand the policy of TEYL as a local content and what teaching practices they do. The results are then as the consideration to generate recommendations for both government and teachers.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

English Curriculum as a Local Content

English has been introduced by many non English speaking countries to be a subject in particular level of education, including Elementary School. In Indonesia, the policy is regulated by Culture and Education Department of Indonesia Republic No. 0487/4/1992, Chapter VIII (*Depdikbud RI No. 0487/4/1992, Bab VIII*). It states that elementary school can add any subject in its curriculum on condition it does not against to national education goal. Further, this policy is strengthened by Decree of Culture and Education Ministry No. 060/U/1993 on 25 February 1993 (*SK Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan No. 060/U/1993 tanggal 25 Februari 1993*) about the possibility of including English as a local content beginning from grade 4 (Speech of Guru Besar Prof. Kasihani E. Suyanto M.A. Ph.D).

Teaching practices have to be well directed in accordance with the fundamental policy decision (i.e curriculum). However, curriculum and practices are often being developed in an ad hoc way because there is little appropriate research to inform the fundamental policy decisions. As Enever and Moon (in Garton, et al, 2011:7) note:

‘ . . . we have yet to clarify the priorities for formulating effective language policies, for designing appropriate programmes of implementation and for meeting the very real challenge of ensuring that policy is effectively and sustainably implemented within the daily practice of classrooms.’

Obviously, being not aware of the current policies then might cause various interpretations that lead into various teaching practices. The orientation of teaching English in elementary school has been broaden by the teachers based on how much they know the curriculum, the philosophy of teaching foreign language to young learners and of course depends on how much they know and be able how to teach EFL to young learners properly.

Teaching English to Young Learners

Nowadays, teaching English to young learners (TEYL) is becoming a trend including in Indonesia. The current demands require them to learn English at their early ages. One of the considerations is to introduce them with new language beyond their native language. There is a common believe that starting earlier is the better. Many experts argue on this issue. Lenneberg in Yuvaraj (2009) claims that the existence of a ‘Critical Period’ in relation to language acquisition, as beginning at age two and ending around puberty. The Hypothesis is based on the proposition that the child’s capacity to acquire language is a ‘genetically triggered, biologically driven process’ that ceases around the age of puberty. Also, Lamendella in Yuvaraj (2009) claims that young learners are at an advantage as the brain is more adaptable before puberty, and that acquisition of language is possible without self-consciousness at an early stage. . In line with the previous experts, Sommer (2011) states that one of the main advantages of starting early is that children become accustomed to the intonation and sounds of the new language. Similarly Cameron in Sommer (2001) argues that “...young learners develop better pronunciation and listening skills” when they begin at an earlier age.

Obviously introducing EFL for early age students does not matter actually. It then matters when the way of introducing (*i.e teaching*) is not based on the children’s age development. Looking at the previous statements, in can be said that teaching English to

young learners should emphasize on listening and speaking (particularly pronunciation). Yet, it does not mean that teaching them with other skills is not allowed. The most important thing that has to be considered is the way teachers treat them as learners. When the practices go wrong and cause them stressful in learning English, then teachers have to reconsider how to teach them properly as kids are not adults in smaller body; they are truly kids that do not know what and how. They have their own world, world of playing and imagining that have not been mature to decide what to learn or how to learn new things. That is a challenge for teachers to know and to fulfill their needs in learning. Then, teachers have to know what and how to teach them in order that the aim of introducing English to early age students is achieved.

Every child has a potential of learning and learns differently. They surely have their own characteristics; they have different learning styles, needs, preferences, and so forth. It will influence the way they learn, including learning English as a new language. According to constructivism theory, treating children as the subject of learning (students-centered learning) is a good idea since they are active learners. This theory emphasizes that children have their own ability to construct meaning based on what they have learned and known from their environment. In addition, the use of “scaffolding” is also suggested by Psychologists Wood, Bruner, and Ross in Yuvaraj (2009). It will help the students to explore the nature of the support system provided by a teacher or more knowledgeable peers to children learning how to carry out a task they could not perform alone.

All in all, introducing EFL to young learners has its consequences. Besides understanding the underlying policy, teachers have to understand the children’s psychology since it is essential to keep them on the right track in deciding the material, the media, teaching technique, evaluation, and everything that they have to deal with teaching EFL to children at their age.

The material for instance, should be designed which accommodate real tasks (Halliwell, 1992). They are not only worthwhile but also interesting. That’s why playing games and singing songs are recommended in teaching children since they are keen on doing those activities. Real tasks which are not just language exercises, provide the children with an occasion for real language use, and let their subconscious mind work on the processing of language while their conscious mind is focused on the task.

Storytelling is another prominent technique which has been known for centuries. It can develop children’s imagination and fantasy. People recognize telling stories is able to promote reality in the classroom and the act of imagining and fantasizing provides powerful stimulus for real language use (Halliwell, 1992).

The use of media for teaching English to YL is absolutely needed since the existence of media can be very helpful. Suhartatik (2008) argues that media can arouse the students’ motivation in learning. There are many kinds of media that can be used, they are: pictures, tape recorder and cassettes, dance, puppets, folding paper, plastic clay, real object/material, flash cards, etc. The use of media surely has to be adapted with the students’ characteristics in order that the teaching goal can be achieved maximally by the presence of the media.

The last thing to be considered is evaluation. Evaluation is aimed at knowing the students’ ability. Dealing with evaluation, according to Sulistyono and S. Rachmajanti (2003), there are two dichotomies of tests: language competence and language performance. There are four categories of test, they are: direct competence test, indirect competence test, direct performance test, and indirect performance test. Direct competence test is a test to measure students’ language component such as vocabulary test in form of speaking or writing

activity. Indirect competence test is a test which aims at measuring language components in written form. Direct performance test is a test which aims at measuring language skills that require the students to perform their skill. Indirect performance test is a test that orientates on measuring language skills by asking the students to do indirect performance (for example: rearrange pictures based on the audio in listening test).

Another approach of evaluation is authentic assessment. According to Sulistyono and S. Rachmajanti (2003), there are some types of authentic assessment. The common types used are: interview, retelling, writing text, project, experiment, observation, reviewing, and portfolio.

Previous Studies

The previous studies concerning to curriculum of English as a local content and teaching practices of English was conducted by Sutardi (2005) and Garton, et al (2011).

Sutardi (2005) stated that in 2003 the curriculum center (*Pusat Kurikulum*), Research and Development Institution, (*Badan Penelitian dan Pengembangan*) created a draft of English curriculum as an alternative curriculum that was expected to be distributed to all English teachers. The curriculum draft then as the material for case study in order to get data, that is Elementary English teachers' suggestion and support on that curriculum draft. The result of this study was that the teachers responded positively to the curriculum draft since they were difficult to get it. They suggested that there should be a national curriculum and standardized material although English was only a local content. They were also expecting to have the curriculum draft of English. The recommendations generated from this study were:

1. Regarding to the distribution of curriculum document, the government has to make sure the availability of references needed and control the quality of books or other resources.
2. The government has to enhance the teachers' quality by providing them with a sufficient budget to provide teachers with training, books, and even funds.
3. Comprehensive further research has to be conducted to improve the quality of English curriculum at future.

The other previous study was conducted by Garton, et al (2011). This study aimed at investigating Primary English teachers dealing with their teaching practices. From the findings of the study, there were five recommendations presented:

1. The pre-service and in-service training provided to teachers of young learners needs to be considerably strengthened.
2. Greater opportunities need to be found for sharing ideas and experiences amongst primary school teachers of English both nationally and internationally.
3. For a large number of teachers, there is substantial need for English language development.
4. An expanded range of materials for teaching young learners is needed.
5. Educational policy developers should be provided with advice, based on current research and good classroom practice, on effective curriculum development for young learners to enhance the learning experience of children.

Those two previous studies recommend some similar things, they are: teachers' quality has to be developed, the availability of the materials has to be enriched, and further research

has to be conducted in order to provide the policy maker with advice on curriculum development in order to enhance the learning experience of young learners.

This present study also generates some recommendations for the local government as policy maker and especially for elementary English teachers that are believed as the action agent that bridges policy and classroom.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study is designed as a qualitative method in which a survey is conducted to know the teachers' responses dealing with the policy and the teaching practices they do.

Data Collection

The data of this study is generated from the questionnaires that are distributed randomly to 40 English teachers of elementary school in 9 sub districts of Kudus regency, they are: Kota, Bae, Gebog, Dawe, Mejobo, Jekulo, Kaliwungu, Jati, and Undaan. The numbers of respondents are 40 Elementary English teachers. The questionnaire consists of 20 items and 1 additional item to know the teachers' opinion and suggestion toward teaching English to young learners.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data, there are some findings that need to be discussed to get a brief overview on how English teachers of elementary schools in Kudus understand the policy of teaching English to young learners and what teaching practice are done. The result of the questionnaire and is presented in the following classification.

a. Teacher's educational background

It is found that 75% out of 40 respondents said that they graduated from English Education Department. There are four respondents who are on-going study of undergraduate program of English Education Department, one senior high school graduate, one graduate of Islamic teaching, one economic school graduate and there are two respondents who claim as diploma 2 of PGSD graduates. It means that most of English teachers of elementary schools in Kudus have appropriate English educational background. And logically they have sufficient knowledge to teach English to young learners well.

b. Respondents' perception about the curriculum

Based on the data, it is found that only 72.5 % respondents stated that they understand the curriculum. There are also 72.5 % respondents said that they teach based on the curriculum. It is accordance to the previous items about educational background. If the teachers graduate from English education department, they know the curriculum and apply it in their teaching practice.

c. The legal rule of English teaching in Elementary school

There are 73 % respondents state that they know the legal rule of English teaching in Elementary schools as a local content, i.e.: Degree of Culture and Education Ministry No. 060/U/1993.

d. The paradigm of teaching English in elementary school

Based on the collected data, 77.5 % out of 40 respondents said that they understand the philosophy of teaching English to elementary school students. Thus, most teachers have learned about children's psychological development. Further, 87.5% respondents reported that teaching English to young learners is different from teaching to adults. It reflects that the way to teach English to young learners has certain characteristics and differs from teaching to adult learners.

e. The use of syllabus

No	Items	Percentage
1	Using the syllabus designed by dinas	80%
2	Agreement with the syllabus designed by dinas	46%

From the table above it can be seen that 80% respondents said that they use the syllabus designed by local Education Institution (*Dinas Pendidikan*). In contrast, there is only 46% respondents who agree with the syllabus they use. But, then it seems that the syllabus is compulsory since the design of the test is based on that syllabus. Of course, the teachers do not have any need to refuse that syllabus. So the question is whether the syllabus is designed by those who really know the English teaching practice for young learners or not.

f. Teaching materials

No.	Items	Percentage
1.	Competency that has to be achieved	92.5%
2.	The use of LKS as the teaching materials	92.5%
3.	Getting other sources	50%
4.	Designing materials	54%
5.	Teaching English skills	85%

Based on the collected data, it is found that almost all English teachers know the competency that has to be achieved. There are 92.5% who said so. Then, there are 92.5% respondents tell that they use LKS as the teaching materials. Otherwise, only 50% respondents who get other sources to complete their materials, and there are 54% respondents reported that they design their teaching materials by themselves. From those percentage it can be concluded that most teachers take LKS for granted as their teaching materials and don't get other sources from books because using LKS is the most practical and easiest way to teach. However, LKS many times does not accommodate teachers' creativity and provide boring activities for students. There are 85% respondents claim that they teach the four English skills completely. It means that they put the same portion of teaching speaking, listening, reading and writing. And they do not focus only to one skill.

g. Evaluation

In doing evaluation, it is found that 80% respondents always use written test. There are only 20% who said that they use oral test sometimes. It is due to time limitation that most teachers prefer having written test than any other types of evaluation. No respondent reported the use of portfolio.

h. Technique of teaching

No.	Items	Percentage
1.	The use of conventional technique	50%
2.	Applying new teaching technique	75%

In teaching English, 50% or half respondents reported that they use conventional technique and 75% said that they often try to apply new teaching techniques or methods. Many teachers use songs and games in their teaching. Some use drill, repetition and role play. Others use TPR, audio visual, dictation and translation. It means that most teachers have various teaching technique, while singing songs and playing games are the most frequent technique used.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In general, it can be concluded that English teachers of elementary schools in Kudus claimed that they fairly understand the curriculum and the legal rule of teaching English to elementary school students. However, they prefer using LKS than designing their teaching material by themselves. Singing song, games and repetition are used most frequently as their teaching techniques. Furthermore they usually only have written test for the evaluation. Thus, their claim of understanding the policy of teaching English to young learners has not been reflected completely in their teaching practices.

The following recommendations are based on the major findings of the study that are addressed to either government or young learner teachers.

1. Syllabus should be designed by the expert and shared to English teacher forum (MGMP) to be criticized and better developed.
2. There should be a local teacher development group or (MGMP) of English teacher in Kudus to accommodate and facilitate the teachers in sharing ideas and experiences and even having some useful programs for teachers' development.
3. An expanded range of materials should be arranged to accommodate local culture as English is a local content. It can minimize the use of LKS provided by a particular publisher that the content is almost often not appropriate with the YL environment.
4. The government needs to maintain and develop the teachers' quality by providing trainings on development of teachers' language proficiency and pedagogical issue.

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