



English Language Teaching Practice in Elementary School Under the Merdeka Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

English has been an important foreign language in Indonesia; it is taught since students in early age. This paper is aimed at portraying the implementation of teaching English in elementary schools in Surabaya which focuses on figuring out typical method, strategies and activities used in elementary English classroom. In addition, this study would like to find out the teachers' beliefs in teaching English in elementary school. To answer the research questions, the study employed qualitative methods with questionnaire as the instrument. There were 13 participants involved in this study. The questionnaire was categorized in two main topics; teaching activities and teacher's beliefs in English teaching. The result of the current study found out that mostly teachers used games in their teaching activities. Also, they believed that.

Keywords: *Young Learners, Teaching Activities, Beliefs, TEYL*

INTRODUCTION

English is used as the first foreign language in Indonesia due to its place as the first international language. It is believed that students who are good at English will have a bright opportunity in the future (Aziza, 2020; Nishanthi, 2018). Being said that many schools put an attempt to teach English effectively with hope their students can master and use it to compete in a workforce. There are some studies that conducted whether started learning English in an early age is better and the results showed that they are better in terms of listening and pronunciation, in a longer term. Also, their speaking skill is sharpened since at their age they are not afraid to try and make mistakes. In contrast, in terms of grammar, adults are better than young learners.

Indonesian students have learnt English since elementary, even before it, but their English proficiency remains unsatisfactory (Sandra Rahmawati et al., 2020). In addition, according to EF survey in 2022, Indonesian English proficiency is below

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Thailand which back then Indonesian was ahead of Thailand and Vietnam. It happens due to many factors, one of them must be the teaching and learning process. Talking about teaching, it does not happen in a night rather it is a long journey and process. Many of senior high school students cannot perform English well because they lack of English foundation and they have to learn from a scratch. Even though they were supposed to get English before then. So, it leads to questions 'How is English teaching and learning conducted in previous stage?'

According to Faridah (2021) teaching English for young learners is likely different from teaching teenagers or adults. Young learners, students from age 7 to 12 years old, are very active learners, they hardly want to sit and listen, and they get bored easily. Also, their focus span is not much, they can only last for an hour max, and it is the best young learners can do. Therefore, selecting activities is a crucial decision due to the young learners' characteristics to motivate and engage in effective teaching and learning process and attain learning objectives.

Due to that fact, it is mandatory to create such an interesting and enjoyable activities for young learners to avoid students' boredom and keep them engaged. In addition, teachers have to give students an opportunity to involve in the teaching and learning process since young learners like to practice directly (learning by doing) rather than listen to the explanation, especially long one. According to Harmer (2008) unless activities are extremely engaging, they get bored easily, losing interest after ten minutes or so. Henceforth, too much explanation and deductive teaching is likely not suitable with young learners' activities. Moreover, in the learning language, teacher should provide activities which sharpen their communication as the purpose of learning a language not just listen to the theory and do passive exercises, especially with young learners. In order to provide a dynamic and exciting learning environment, particular methods for young learners tend to incorporate interactive and hands-on activities, visual aids, games, music, storytelling, and play-based learning. using these activities, children are given the opportunity to actively investigate and create their grasp of ideas and abilities (Ikawati, 2017).

To accommodate such a meaningful and enjoyable teaching and learning, as well as help students improve their English. The government has already made decision to include English as mandatory subject in primary school, as before it was in the previous curriculum only as an extracurricular subject. It was put in phases A to F as described in the table. Furthermore, it is stated on:

<https://guru.kemdikbud.go.id/kurikulum/referensi-penerapan/capaian-pembelajaran/sd-sma/bahasa-inggris/>

that phase A is for grade one and two, B is for grade three and four. C is for grade 5 and 6, D is for grade seven up to nine, and phase E is for grade ten, the last phase is for grade eleven and twelve. Therefore, activities in the classroom are supposed to be carefully selected and designed to help them confident and gain their language performance and competence. Teachers should avoid such activities which lead them to be afraid in trying. Shortly, teaching strategies for young learners encompass a

wide range of instructional approaches and techniques tailored to the developmental needs and characteristics of children. These strategies aim to promote active engagement, meaningful learning, and holistic development, setting a strong foundation for their educational journey.

METHODS

The purpose of this study to portray how English teaching was conducted at Ana Maritim elementary schools. The participants of this study were an English teacher and sixteen six graders. In order to find out the answer, the researcher used descriptive qualitative research design. The data were taken from interview and observations. The interview questions, as the first research instrument, were used to get the data of the teacher's understanding on the Merdeka curriculum and it was done through semi-structured interview. The next instrument was field note which used during the observation to describe the teaching and learning process. The camera video was also used as a means of capturing the process in the classroom in case the researchers missed something during the observation. The data then analyzed qualitatively through thematic analysis.

RESULTS

During the first **observation**, the teacher, Miss Sara, started the class by opening the class; greeting, asking the students' condition, and checking the students' presence. Then, she continued on reminding the students about the homework; memorizing vocabulary. Previously, she gave a list of words and asked the students to memorize it at home. She then asked for the students to come forward to reciting words from the previous lesson. The activities took times since one-by-one students had to come forward. Then, she decided to call on who hadn't done yet after school at the teacher office as she noticed that the time was not enough for the next lesson.

Next, she asked the students to open their workbook and started teaching names of places and objects related to government. For example, a province was led by a governor, and a kingdom was ruled by a king or queen. After drilling and explaining those target vocabularies, she asked the students to do translation exercise from English to Bahasa Indonesia on the workbook. Then, she discussed the answer with them. In the observations it was found that the students cooperatively joined the process. They seemed enthusiast when they had a discussion over the activities.

Having done with the translation exercises, the students were asked to do another multiple choice on their workbook (LKS). During this activity, many students asked her about the meaning and she helped them directly by giving translation. Instead of discussing with the students, the teacher wrote the answer directly on the whiteboard, and asked the students to check and correct their answer. Then, they were welcomed to come front to get mark from her. Since, there were still students who had not done the work yet, she assigned them to do it at home.

The second observation was quite the same, the teacher greeted the students and started the lesson by giving instruction to students to open their worksheet. This time,

the teacher still used workbook as the main source of teaching and learning. She asked the students to do chapter review as the preparation of upcoming summative test. The students also asked for translation of the confusing words. This time no much activities could be portrayed, mostly the students did the activities on review.

The third meeting on February 20th, 2024, Ms. Sara was late to start the class because there was a problem with the schedule. The class started with greetings from Miss Sara and she asked the students about their condition. Miss Sara gave an exercise to her students from the early semester until now. She made ten questions which included all of the materials that had been taught before. The class situation was so interactive because Miss Sara did not push her students and just enjoyed it when they did the exercise. This exercise was given by Miss Sara before they had a summative test in early March. The exercise was a writing test; it started when Miss Sara wrote the questions on the whiteboard and her students followed to write on their books. The exercise was done by a group of students and Miss Sara chose the group. The sixth-grade students were so active and interested when they had a discussion group to finish the exercise. Miss Sara gave them an explanation for each question and translated it into Bahasa Indonesia. After almost 15 minutes they did the exercise, Miss Sara announced that the exercise was postponed to finish it in the next week. Then, the English class was over.

The last day of observation on Tuesday, 27th February 2024. Miss Sara began her class at 10.35 a.m.; she directly announced to start the weekly examination. Not for so long, Miss Sara asked her students to be quiet and her students followed it. Then, Miss Sara starting wrote the weekly examination questions on the whiteboard. She wrote twenty questions for the weekly examination. She used fill-in-the-blank and a short answer question. When she wrote the questions, her students started to follow writing all of the questions and answered them on their book. Miss Sara gave her students a half hour to finish the weekly examination. The class situation when the weekly examination was held ran smoothly.

After all of the students finished their examinations, Miss Sara invited her students to fill in the questions on the board together. Then, Miss Sara asked her students to give their books to their friends randomly according to Miss Sara, so they checked the weekly examination answer crosswise. Then, the students calculated the right answer and gave the final score according to the right answer then times with the total questions. Miss Sara asked the students who finished giving the score to go in front of the class to get Miss Sara's signature. The weekly examination was done.

The **interview** was done in order to enrich the finding regarding the implementation of Merdeka curriculum at the school under the study. There were seventeen questions in the interview.

The first session was about the teacher's biography and teaching experience. It was found that she was undergraduate from English department at one of universities in Surabaya. She was in her 30s. She has been teaching English for 3-5 years with less than five years teaching experience in elementary school. at the school under the study, she taught grade 1-6 with the average students in a class is less than 20. She also stated in the interview that her English level was in upper-intermediate. In her teaching she mostly used mix languages.

In the interview it was clarified that the teacher was using the latest national curriculum,

Merdeka curriculum. She has implemented this curriculum for one year. During the implementation, the teacher received training but not specifically for English teaching. To get deeper information regarding the teacher's understanding about the Merdeka curriculum. She was asked the difference between Merdeka curriculum and 2013 curriculum, she mentioned the difference lies on the teaching materials, she added that in this curriculum it has more vocabularies, listening section, conversation for students to get deeper understanding. She gave testimony that this curriculum was better than previous curriculum due to the teaching focus and material. She referred to the more exposure of pronunciation activities and vocabularies in the curriculum, especially on the workbook she was using. However, she added some students got difficulty words in the curriculum (workbook). When she was asked the essence of English language teaching in Merdeka curriculum in elementary level, she thought that the teaching and learning to hone students' vocabulary and pronunciation mastery as well as how to read English text. further, she mentioned in the interview that the students were interested in English class, they were often curious and asked for how to pronounce the words. Regarding the teaching technique, she honestly has not implemented a particular teaching technique since she depended on the use of textbook in her daily teaching. It could be seen from the observation that she mostly used textbook as the main teaching resource. Further, she explained she normally used the teaching cycle as follows; practicing conversation, listening, reading a text, and memorizing the vocabularies.

The assessment was done through formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment was done based on the students' workbook (LKS) and daily test. The assessment was mostly in a form of multiple choice and memorization. the summative assessment was done in a form of multiple choice as well. The next questions were about her understanding on the benefit and drawbacks of the Merdeka curriculum. She mentioned that this curriculum is good in terms of the teaching materials, however, some materials are too difficult. Then, she did not elaborate more.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings above, in this section, the researchers divide the discussion into two themes; the teaching and learning activities and assessment.

The Teaching and Learning Activities

English teachers at elementary school play an important role in students' language learning development. At this level, probably students are the first time introduced to a new language. Therefore, the teaching and learning activities should be designed carefully so that they could students maximize their foreign language potential. Teaching and learning activities in this case refer to a series of activities that a teacher does to achieve expected outcomes (Sayed Munna & Kalam, 2021). This teaching and learning activities for young learners can be done in students-centered approach and teacher centered approach. Also, teachers could use various ways, strategies, or techniques such as delivering lesson through games, songs, demonstration and etc.

At the school under the study, it can be seen that the teacher applied teacher-centered approach. The teacher acted as a center of learning and she mostly dominated the classroom activities. Other characteristics of the teaching and learning

process which were portrayed were the use of mother tongue, translation activity, vocabulary teaching and memorization. As it was depicted that the teaching and learning process at the school under the study was conducted in Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). Grammar Translation Method is one of the oldest methods which focus on building students' reading and writing skills (Milawati, 2019). In this type of teaching, speaking activities are not primary concern. It could be showed in the teaching and learning that almost no speaking activities, the teacher's concern was vocabulary. The vocabulary is seen as the main objective in the teaching and learning process and its characteristic is the vocabulary is taught isolated, the students did not learn the targeted vocabulary as a means of communication, but it seems that they are taught the vocabulary merely to know the meaning and do the exercises. Translation is normally done to carry out the teaching activity as what the teacher at the school under the study did in the classroom. She chose translation and memorization as a means to teach vocabulary.

It is unquestionable the importance and position of vocabulary in language learning. Vocabulary is a pivotal in language learning since no language is conveyed without vocabulary as well as students will face difficulty in communication unless they have ample vocabulary. Therefore, teaching language could build students' cognitive about the language being learnt (Deni & Fahriany, 2020). In that case, teachers have to find out the most effective ways for their students to acquire it. Does translation and memorization effective in teaching and learning?

Historically speaking Translation has been used in a classical foreign language class. The practice of translation makes the class bilingual as shown by the teacher under the study, she translated from English to Indonesia for vocabulary she taught Bahasa Indonesia as a mother tongue has a function (a) to do a translation, explanation, elaboration, and exemplification, (b) as instructional purposes such as for explaining an activity and its objectives, giving reference to special sources, directing classroom conversation, asking and answering question, and clarifying the doubts (Pratiwi, 2022; Pujiani et al., 2022; Sumarningsih et al., 2018). Using translation is still a major issue in foreign language teaching and learning. Some teachers stated that the use of full English in the classroom lead to students' confusion. However, when the teacher use of mother tongue in teaching and language learning, students' will not gain or improve their English skill due to lack of exposure (Sumarningsih et al., 2018).

Despite the issue, Jadallah & Hasan (2011) said that the use of translation has benefit to students' understanding, and this practice was for the sake of the students' understanding improvement. It could be understood that the students might have a better understanding in reading or probably they could write. However, nowadays the purpose of learning language is for being able to communicate rather than specifically in reading ability. In that case, the teaching English as a foreign is supposed to be focused on honing students' ability to communicate especially young learners. As mandated in the current Merdeka curriculum that teaching English in elementary school should focus on written and spoken language by the end of phase C. It means that the teacher should not only focus on isolated word and reading but also students' spoken skill and the use of mother tongue have effect on students writing and speaking skill (Anindya et al., 2022; Sari & Masruddin, 2025).

In English language teaching, the use of each teaching method brings its strength and weakness. If we take a look at the school under the study, and the way how the

students were in the English class, the students were not seen stress during the class, it could be seen from the students who were enthusiast and enjoyed their time with the teachers. The use of local language and mother tongue during the teaching and learning process could be one of the reasons why the teaching and learning was less stressful. They felt comfortable since mother tongue was used in their classroom activities. The students also actively often asked for the translation if they encountered difficult words. They were not afraid of asking when they had a trouble. It is not like what it says about GTM that students tend to be passive. It could be a positive but it could also mean that the students depend on the teachers all the time, they seem untrained to cope with the difficult world by themselves such as through the context and look for the dictionary. As it is proven that Grammar-Translation demerits are the students' dependency on the teacher and teachers act as a single source in the classroom.

Assessment

To make sure that the teaching and learning process is successful, assessment needs to be done to see whether the expected outcome has been achieved. Speaking of assessment in Merdeka curriculum, it is suggested that the teachers need to apply three kinds of assessments; diagnostic assessment, formative assessment and summative assessment. The diagnostic assessment is conducted to see the students' understanding on the subject is going to be taught. Having this assessment, teachers could develop a suitable material for the students. However, the teacher at the school under the study didn't use this kind of assessment. The only reflected in this study was formative assessment.

The teacher did the formative assessment in a form of memorization, exercises, and daily test. As it was mentioned earlier that the students were given a list of words and they were asked to memorize it. The list of words was taken from the previous lesson in hope that the students acquire the vocabulary. However, memorizing words seem shallow technique to obtain maximal outcome in acquiring vocabulary because the words which are on a list are isolated, meaning that the students only know the meaning since they were asked to translate and memorize it. However, do they know how to use them? There are three things to practice in learning vocabulary; its form, its meaning and its function (Rashid et al., 2022). Students are said know its form if they know how to spell it correctly, pronounce it correctly, and recognize the part of the words (noun, adjective, verb, and adverb), and know how to use the word parts to perform meaning. Students know its meaning; students have to understand how to use the words to express certain meaning. To know how to use the words meaning that students are able to put the words in grammatically correct. So, if the teacher only asks students memorize the words, they only know its meaning, they don't acquire the words yet since they still couldn't perform its form and its use.

The second assessment as a means of formative assessment was taken from their workbook and the teacher admitted that workbook is the source of her for conducting formative assessment. Fundamentally, a formative assessment is used to assesses students' progress by conducting a test during the lesson or at the end of the class. It could be manifested in a form of a fort-polio, demonstration, written test, free writing, true or untrue, etc. However, according to Permendikbud No 81A (2013), formative assessments are used to evaluate student competence, encouraging learner autonomy and critical thinking to enhance conceptual understanding. In that case,

taking formative test based on only students' workbook is acceptable but it is not enough to assess students' critical thinking or learner autonomy since the students might have done it at home with the help of their private teacher, for example.

In teaching and learning English, teacher does not only need to assess students' knowledge of syntax and vocabulary as well as their abilities in using English as a means of communication, but more that how students create and interpret meaning, not just related with their language skills but also regarding knowledge and their experience (Noning et al., 2023). According to Cameron (2001) there are five principles of assessing children's language learning. The first principle is taken from Vygotskyan perspective on learning that highlights the need for social context through interaction in learning. This perspective suggest that a child can do with helpful others both predicts the next stage in learning and gives a better assessment of learning. The second principle is to ensure the assessment should assist teachers predict the impact of the assessment on their teaching and plan accordingly. As assessment and teaching have strong correlation, results are supposed to be used to improve teaching practice and learning process. The third, young learners' language teachers should keep in mind that assessment is not a one-time event. It happens throughout the learning process through observation, interaction, and classroom activities. The fourth, skilled teachers assess not too often test students understanding how much they have learnt. The last, students and parents should understand the assessment. Children need to know the purpose of the activities.

CONCLUSION

This article would like to report the implementation of English Language teaching at Ana Maritim Elementary school in Surabaya which have implemented Merdeka curriculum. This research is limited only at one school with one teacher and one class as participants. However, this research could be a lead and further research to portray the implementation of teaching and learning based on Merdeka curriculum. The findings revealed that the teaching and learning process still conducted conventionally in term of the use of teaching approach, methods and strategies. Additionally, the assessment seems not maximal; the teacher only used workbook and written test as a means of assessment. Therefore, it is suggested for the stakeholder there to hold teacher training to maximize the teaching and learning process.

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