TEACHERS’ OPINION OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN AMBARAWA, CENTRAL JAVA

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Abstract
This study is aimed to explore teachers’ opinion and attitude towards the teaching of English as a local content in elementary school curriculum. The research participants were 8 elementary English teachers in Ambarawa. The data were collected using a one-to-one interview that allows the participants to explore their opinions. The results of this study reveal that the teachers realize the need of mastering English in today’s globalized era. They believe that learning English needs to start from early age. Thus, most teachers show a supportive opinion towards introducing English in the elementary school although the condition of their region has little direct needs of English. The teachers view that language knowledge (such as vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation) is the first thing to be taught in this primary level. However, teachers also display some concerns with the English teaching implementation that they have to face in their teaching, namely guidelines for English lesson syllabus, lesson time allocation, teaching facilities, and employment status.

Keywords: curriculum, TEYL, TEFL

INTRODUCTION

English as a foreign language in Indonesia has been officially taught at school in 1950 (Dardjowijojo, 2000). By that time, the policy makers decided that English as a foreign language
is included in the school curriculum with the purpose of speeding up national development and establishing relationship with other nations (Harsono, 2005). In current time, Indonesian government realizes the importance of English in today’s globalized world. This can be seen from the effort of encouraging English by allowing English lessons to be taught at primary school level education as a “muatan lokal” (local content of the school curriculum). Since then, some public elementary schools have started to introduce English as a study subject, or even use English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI). This condition shows a great development of English in Indonesia, especially in today’s school system.

Jamilah (2008) describes “muatan lokal” (local content) as the program activity that aims to develop students competence based on unique needs, interest, and strength of the local region which is substantial, and could not be classified into the existing subject matters. Each elementary school in Indonesia has the privilege to decide whether it would like to include English in their local curriculum content. English as the local content in the elementary school level, according to Kasmainedi (2009), has been flourishing since the issuing of SK Mendikbud (Ministry of Education Policy) No. 060/U/1993 which stated that in primary school, English is offered as an elective subject. As an elective subject, the schools may introduce this subject if they have the available resources (Septy, 2000). In the past few years, along with the development of Rintisan Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional or RSBI (International-standard pilot project school), the number of elementary schools that offer English as the local content in their curriculum is increasing.

In general, the main goal of English in elementary school level, as stated in the Peraturan Pemerintah (Government Law) No. 22/2006, is to introduce Indonesian young learners to English language as well as to develop their ability in learning English as a foreign language (Depdiknas, 2008). The teaching of English covers all four skills:

- ruang lingkup bahasa Inggris di SD/MI mencakup kemampuan berkomunikasi lisan secara terbatas dalam konteks sekolah, yang meliputi aspek mendengarkan, berbicara, membaca, dan menulis. Ketampilan menulis
dan membaca diarahkan untuk menunjang pembelajaran komunikasi lisan.

(The scope of English lesson covers the ability to communicative in the immediate school context, which comprise of language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The writing and reading skills are aimed to support the spoken communication learning).

It can be seen here, that there is still a heavy emphasis on spoken communication. There is also a belief that introducing English in the elementary school can prepare learners to study English in their next higher level of education (junior and senior high school).

In accommodating the teaching and learning process of English as the local content, the government provides general guidelines of the curriculum and material development for 4th to 6th grades classes. For schools who decide to include English lesson starting from 1st grade, they have to design and develop the English lesson curriculum and teaching materials by themselves. Teachers and curriculum designers of the school have their own freedom of designing the English lesson curriculum and teaching materials that they consider as suitable for their local needs and setting. Teachers often play the role of designing the English lesson curriculum and of designing teaching materials at schools which adopt this policy (English as the local content). Therefore, it would be interesting to explore teachers’ opinion towards the implementation of this policy in their school context, in this case in Ambarawa. In exploring this issue, the following general research questions are addressed: What do the teachers think of the policy of English as a local content in elementary school in Ambarawa? What are their beliefs about learning English in elementary school level? What challenges do they meet in their teaching work?

The general aim of this study is to find out teachers’ opinion of and their attitudes towards the implementation of this policy in their school contexts. This study would be beneficial in terms of providing information about how teachers’ view and understand the implementation of English as a local content in elementary school level. In addition, the findings of this study may encourage
more research in the teaching of English in elementary school and issues of teachers’ professional development in this area as well as other teaching contexts in Indonesia.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ENGLISH AS THE LOCAL CONTENT SUBJECTS IN SCHOOLS IN AMBARAWA

Based on Peraturan Pemerintah No. 22 Tahun 2006, the national government regulates eight (8) compulsory subjects, one (1) local content subject, and one (1) self-development activity (p. 9). This regulation explains muatan lokal (local content) as:

*Muatan lokal merupakan kegiatan kurikuler untuk mengembangkan kompetensi yang disesuaikan dengan ciri khas dan potensi daerah, termasuk keunggulan daerah, yang materinya tidak dapat dikelompokkan ke dalam mata pelajaran yang ada.*

(local content is a curricular program to develop the competencies that are adjusted to the local characteristics and resources, including the local strength, in which the material of the lesson cannot be categorized into the existing subject).

Local content usually covers local language, culture, or local characteristics and other knowledge that is considered to be important for the local context (today, this includes English) depending on the school’s policy.

Based on the time allocation that has been decided by the national government, if the school applies more than 1 local content and self-development activity, they should allocate extra hours for both local content subject and self-development activity. The time allocation for elementary school is 35 minutes for one lesson session (*jam pelajaran*).

In Ambarawa, most elementary schools usually implement more than one local content subjects. The first one is Javanese language and tembang jawa (classic Javanese recitation), which is decided by the local government. The second local content is English which is determined by the school. Since English as a local content is determined by the school, all the necessary requirements of the teaching of English lesson must be developed
by the school independently (such as the syllabus design, teaching materials, teaching approaches and methods, evaluation, etc.). In accommodating the teaching and learning of English in class, the schools usually use textbooks or Lembar Kerja Siswa (students’ worksheets) as the base of teaching English. The teachers also design and use their own standard on grading their students.

TEACHER’S BELIEFS ON LEARNING ENGLISH AT A YOUNGER AGE

As part of understanding the teachers’ opinion about the implementation of English as the local content subject, I firstly look at their beliefs about learning and teaching English at early education. According to Williams and Burden (2009), teacher’s belief about what learning is will affect everything that they do in the classroom, whether these beliefs are implicit or explicit. In addition, Richards (2005) states that teachers belief systems are founded on the goals, values, and beliefs teachers hold in relation to the content and process of teaching, and their understanding of systems in which they work and their roles within it (p.30). He categorizes the teachers’ beliefs into four: the beliefs about English, beliefs about learning, beliefs about teaching, and beliefs about the program and curriculum (p. 33-39). This statement confirms that the teachers’ beliefs are important to understand since they usually become the ground of teachers’ opinion and practice. Hence, it is necessary to firstly find out their belief about the teaching and learning of English at younger age in the elementary school level. This information is useful to understand teachers’ thinking of the implementation of the local content policy as the systems in which they work and how teachers respond to this policy in their teaching practice.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is a qualitative study as to find out the teachers’ opinion towards the curriculum policy that they experience. McMillan and Schumacher (2006, p. 315) describe “qualitative research as an inquiry in which researchers collect data in face-to-face situations by interacting with selected persons in their setting.
(e.g., field research)” They also add that this research describes and analyzes people’s individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions.

The study was conducted in several elementary schools in Ambarawa, a small town in Central Java. The participants were selected using convenience sampling in which the participants are available for and willing to participate in the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996, p.100). The participants’ willingness to be interviewed is very important in gaining their trust and information sought for this study. A total of eight (8) respondents of various English teachers in Ambarawa (coming from 5 public schools and 3 private schools) agreed to participate. The participants come from different background of education, social, and teaching context. There are 2 participants who do not come from English education background, 2 participants who are English teachers teaching in 3 or 4 elementary schools in Ambarawa.

Table 1. Participants’ background information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Educational background</th>
<th>Teaching context</th>
<th>Teaching experience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>BA degree in TEFL</td>
<td>Public school</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>BA degree in Engineering</td>
<td>Public school</td>
<td>10 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>BA degree in English Literature</td>
<td>Public school</td>
<td>9 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher D</td>
<td>BA degree in Information Engineering</td>
<td>Public school</td>
<td>7 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher E</td>
<td>BA degree in TEFL</td>
<td>Private school</td>
<td>3 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher F</td>
<td>BA degree in English Literature</td>
<td>Private school</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher G</td>
<td>BA degree in TEFL</td>
<td>Private school</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher H</td>
<td>Professional non-degree in TEFL</td>
<td>Public school</td>
<td>14 years</td>
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Data Collection

In collecting the data, a semi-structured interview was used as the research instrument to allow the participants to talk about their opinion and other related matters about the policy of English in elementary school. The interview was conducted on a one-to-one basis in which the interviewee asked questions and recorded answers from only one participant at the time (Creswell, 2008, p. 227) to accommodate the authenticity of the answers. The interview was conducted in Indonesian or the language that they
feel comfortable of using for ease of answering the interview questions that allows the participants to freely speak of their minds in their own speech style rather than restricting them to use one specific language. All participants used a mix of Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese in the interview. The interview lasted for 20-45 minutes, and the data collections lasted approximately 2 weeks. All the interviews were audio-taped.

The interviews data gathered were then transcribed, translated into English, and coded as the primary data of this study. Some main points or themes emerged from the interview were grouped. The quoted examples from the data collected were given to support each point in the process of analyzing the data. The data was analyzed descriptively based on emerging themes of the transcribed interviews, and some supporting theories were included to carry out the analysis.

**DISCUSSION: TEACHER’S BELIEFS ON ENGLISH LEARNING**

Borg (2001) defines teachers’ beliefs as the proposition which may be consciously and unconsciously held. It is evaluated and accepted by individual (teacher), and serves as a guide to thought and behavior (p. 186). When asked about the best time for someone to start learning English, all eight teachers agree that English should be learned as early as childhood years. Since the teachers believe that elementary school is where the basic knowledge (such as writing the letters, simple vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation) is taught. English should, therefore, be taught from elementary school onwards. This opinion is clearly stated by teacher E and D:

*Menurut saya emang harusnya sih dikenalkan sejak dini. Karena saya merasakan belajar Bahasa Inggris di usia yang nggak muda lagi itu susah, dulu saya belajar Bahasa Inggris itu di SMP, nyantelnya itu lama sekali, soalnya kan nggak punya basic pas SD. Lebih mudah lah kalo mereka belajar Bahasa Inggris sejak kecil.*

I think children should learn English since early age. I experienced learning English in the older age, in junior
high school, and I felt it is too hard because I don’t have the basic [knowledge of English]. (Teacher E)

The material in junior high school is more complicated, like tenses, rules and patterns, and the writing is also emphasized. If the students have not acquired basic knowledge such as a/an, this/that, subject, auxiliary earlier, they will be left behind because in junior high school, the curriculum is quite fixed [to be followed]. (Teacher D)

Teacher E’s belief is heavily influenced from her past English learning in which she thinks that she was not previously prepared to learn English in her junior high school years. This experience informed her teaching and learning beliefs that basic knowledge of English (e.g. vocabularies and grammar) needs to be introduced much earlier than grade 7, that is in the elementary school level. Complementing teacher E’s response, Teacher D states the importance of aligning English teaching in elementary school with the students’ next educational (Junior High School) level curriculum. Elementary teachers are, therefore, expected to be able to identify some basic knowledge that will be used as the foundation in learning English in Junior High School.

Several other teachers (teacher D, F, and G) indicate English to be taught and learned as early as kindergarten level. This is best presented by teacher G who shares her thoughts as follows:

Teaching activities in kindergarten school is fun. English teacher in kindergarten is also expected to give fun activity to the students. It is like what my niece’s English teacher does. She teaches using games and songs by asking students to play and claps their hands in class. It makes my niece love to learn English. I think the interest of learning English is important. When they have interest in it, it will ease them to learn English. It will help them to learn English in elementary school level too.

From her opinion, Teacher G views that kindergarten is the best time to grow children’s interest of learning English through interesting and fun teaching activities. She believes that the early interest in English can motivates students to learn English in the next level. This is analogous with Harmer (2007) statement that
students’ feelings go away beyond concerns about how people learn and remember language item (p. 58). It explains that the higher the positive value of English that the students feel, the better they learn English.

The teachers’ belief of the importance of learning English starting from elementary school level may also be influenced by teachers’ opinion on the current phenomenon of globalization. All eight teachers are of the opinion that it is imperative for children to learn English in order to be able to keep up with the globalization development. They see that English is used in all aspects of life like technology, education, social, and working field. Teacher H, for example, explains her opinion about this as follows:

Today is a globalization era. Even computer (instructions) use English, it is the technology [era]. Play station video-game, for example, uses English too. Even about 50 percent of jobs (in Indonesia) require English. If the students are not accustomed with English, they will be left behind. In junior high school, the teachers will not be able to teach English effectively and efficiently in such a short time because they have to follow the curriculum. That is why, they should learn English since elementary school to acquire the basics.

Teacher H seems to agree with Harmer (2007) who states that by the end of the twentieth century English was widely used for communication between people who do not share the same first language (p. 13). As what the other teachers’ say about globalization era, it shows that all teachers are aware of the pressure of mastering English in the near future. This awareness also informs their teaching and learning beliefs of English that needs to start from early age for the purpose of preparing a new generation in their participation in the globalized era in their near future.

The Content of English Lesson

The teachers believe that language knowledge needs to be firstly learned by the students in elementary school level. The teachers view that it is important to focus on the acquisition of English vocabulary first before they go through the topic of the
lesson. As Cook (2008) states that a large number of words are needed in order to be able to speak a language (p. 46), the teachers, therefore, believe that they need to supply a high number of vocabularies to the early age learners. Lightbown and Spada (2006) support the need of learning high number of vocabularies by affirming that the most impressive language development in early school years is the growth of vocabulary (p. 9). Thus, the teachers must make the best use of the children’s ability at this early age in learning a language.

Besides vocabulary, the teachers also focus on English pronunciation and spelling. All teachers believe that pronunciation needs to be given attention to since first grade so that the students are able to pronounce English words in a “correct” way from early on. This idea is best represented by Teacher H’s response:

I firstly teach the pronunciation. I teach them to say “good morning”. It turned out that teaching them to say it with the right pronunciation is difficult. They would say good morrning, with clear rrr… I think the most difficult is teaching grade 1, the pronunciation should be precisely correct and do not sound ‘medhok’[with heavy Javanese accent]. It has to follow the European structure [native speaker of English].

From the excerpt above, it can be seen that Teacher H views students’ mother tongue heavily influences the students’ production of English sounds. She describes how difficult it was to teach students to produce certain English words without having a thick Javanese accent. This experience strengthens her belief that learners need to be trained as early as possible to produce, what she believes to be, the “correct” English sounds. It can be seen that Teacher H believes that the “native-speaker English” (of Western countries) as the “standard” English. Teacher H’s belief may have been influenced by her past learning experience that emphasized on native-like English pronunciation. In her point of view, the “native speaker English” is the correct reference and the standard for language proficiency in language teaching. In this case, Teacher H may believe on the assumption that the aim of language teaching is to make students to be like the “native speaker of English”. This is quite in contrast with Cook (2008)
who says that it is actually inappropriate to base language teaching on the native speaker model since each country may have its own variety (p. 172).

In addition to vocabulary and pronunciation, spelling is also another language aspect that the teachers focus on in English lesson in the elementary school level. However, there are a variety of opinions on when spelling needs to be introduced at this school level. There are 3 teachers who have emphasized on spelling since grade 1; 4 teachers emphasize spelling on grade 2; while 1 teacher who emphasizes spelling in grade 4. Teacher F, for example, emphasizes that spelling needs to be introduced as early as grade 1 to get learners accustomed to this basic knowledge. She stated her opinion as follows:

Spelling is very important to be trained since first grade. First grade is the very beginning class, so that they know whether they write the right spelling or not. If they are not accustomed to write the right spelling from the very beginning, they will keep on making the same mistakes. I have a transferred student from a public school, she is in grade 4, and she writes “techer” rather than “teacher”, and “rabit” rather than “rabbit”. Although the mistake is only the missing letter, but I think it is quite fatal.

From the excerpt above, it can be seen that Teacher F’s belief reflects a form of habit formation approach to the teaching of English to young learners. From perspective of behaviorism, the acquisition of English knowledge of vocabulary and its writing system can be successfully achieved through early exposure, familiarization, and treatment of constant error correction (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). The same opinion is also stated by teacher A and D. These teachers also view that the learning of L2 skills and knowledge (such as vocabulary, reading and writing) can be simultaneously be done while learners are learning language skills and knowledge of their L1.

Different from teacher D, teacher B, C, E, and G emphasize spelling in grade 2. The best response is probably presented by Teacher C:

I would start emphasizing on the teaching of the right spelling in grade 2 because first graders haven’t been
able to write yet, even in Bahasa Indonesia. English spelling is so different from its pronunciation, I’m afraid they might get confused. In grade 2, they [students] can write quite fluently so it will be easier to teach the right spelling to them.

From the response above, Teacher C views that the students must acquire the basic skills of the first language before they learn second language. Grade 1 is where the students learn and acquire basic spelling in their first language, for example, writing letters, syllables, and also sentences. Thus, Teacher C views that the ability in noticing spelling in L1 can be a reference to learn L2. These teachers are also aware of the difference language system between Bahasa Indonesia and English. Unlike Bahasa Indonesia, English has no one-to-one relation between the alphabet and the sound. These teachers fear that introducing the writing and sound systems of Bahasa Indonesia and English at parallel may complicate the process of learning and acquisition of both languages. Similarly, Teacher H, agrees with teacher B, C, and G. She, however, suggests spelling to be introduced at grade 4 because, to her, the lower grade students (grade 1 – 3) do not involve a lot of writing activity in class compared to the higher graders (grade 4 – 6). She considers that the teaching of English to the lower grades students needs to aim at familiarizing and growing the students’ interest toward English. Since the higher grades students have already been able to write and spell, she thinks that it is the right time to focus on English spelling. Teacher H’s belief is supported by her opinion that, students’ cognitive development at this range of age is better than the lower graders. This is in line with Harmer’s (2007) idea which states that the relative superiority of older children as language learners (especially in formal educational setting) may have something to do with their increased cognitive abilities, which allow them to benefit from more abstract approaches to language teaching (p. 81). Teacher H views that students’ cognitive development of higher grades may assist learners in recognizing the writing and sound systems of English that is quite different from Bahasa Indonesia.

Besides the language knowledge that is emphasized in elementary school, the teachers also focus on another aspect in
learning language, like speaking. Teacher G and H promote the need of teaching speaking. The reason for this concern is best presented by Teacher G:

So far, my teaching is focusing more on speaking, like simple functions: what is the name of this thing, greeting, introduction, and some utterances that are usually used in daily activity because I think it is better to start learning by practicing English. So far, I think it is more effective to teach English from its language use.

Teacher G believes that students learn best by experiencing the language, so she prefers to start with the teaching of using English (or experiencing the language by speaking it) in her teaching. In this sense, her teaching fits the framework of communicative approach. This approach views “language is for communication” (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Learning to use language is viewed as to be an essential part in communicating in the target language. This theory affirms the way Teacher G’s view of focusing on speaking to give more experience of listening and practicing the language to the students so that the students have more exposures to English.

**Teachers’ Opinion Towards The Policy of English As A Local Content In Elementary School Curriculum**

When asked about their opinion on the policy of English as the local content, most of them do not give a direct answer. Each teacher has their own opinion of the policy and expresses various aspects that need to be considered in accepting this policy. As the result, they answer the questions by enclosing some point of views.

An interesting fact is shown by Teachers B and C who view the policy with its relation to their employment status and prosperity:

Even if I don’t agree with the policy, I don’t think they (the government) would listen to me. Certainly I want English to become the compulsory subject. It cannot be denied that it is related to the employment status as a teacher, and the teaching salary. If English is still implemented as a local content subject, English teachers will never be promoted or employed as a PNS (civil service
teacher) and will only be employed as a non-tenure part-time teacher. (Teacher B)

I think English in Ambarawa is mostly used just as a standby stock. If the class teacher can teach subjects and know English, then, English teacher won’t be needed anymore. ... Once, I taught as an English teacher in a school. Then, there was a teacher who retired. The school employed a new civil service teacher who was also a class teacher and I was dismissed because the new teacher can teach subjects and English, so the school doesn’t need me to teach English anymore. So, I felt like I’m just a by-stander. (Teacher C)

In an Indonesian context, teachers who are teaching in public school levels are usually teachers who are aiming to be employed by the government as Pegawai Negeri Sipil (civil service employees). In order to be employed as a civil service employee, a teacher needs to firstly be appointed and assigned by the school to teach and handle one full class, this is usually known as being a “guru kelas” (class teacher). In elementary school level, the class-teacher teaches all subject matters for the assigned class. However, since English is currently added into the local-content curriculum, English lesson teachers are needed and employed as temporary casual employees. This means they are paid by the hours. From the excerpt above, Teacher B, who has taught English for 6 years in the school, felt rather disappointed with the policy since the condition above does not give her a secure position in the school and therefore little income. She thought that her profession as an elementary school English subject teacher (teaching English as the local content subject) provides very little chance for her to be appointed as a class teacher. The regulation from the government states that a teacher who teaches non-compulsory subject is not eligible to be employed as a PNS. Similarly, Teacher C views the less bargaining position of an English teacher in the elementary school level and how she feels like a by-stander teacher. She feels that English teacher in elementary school is only needed when there are some elementary teachers who are unable to teach English. She shows a concern for those who graduates from an English Language Teaching Department
do not have a high bargaining position when applying to elementary public school level as an English teacher.

On the other hand, Teachers D and F show a supportive attitude towards the implementation of English as the local content subject policy for the Ambarawa context. They see Ambarawa as *daerah pinggiran* (a suburban area) which is far away from the centre of the city and still has a big influence from traditional culture and local language. Thus, they think that they should not force their students to learn English by making it as a compulsory subject. Teachers D and G respond to the policy as follows:

I think so far it’s okay. I mean it depends on what type of elementary schools we are talking about. There are RSBI (International standard school project), and there are regular schools. For RSBI school, I think it is suitable to implement English as a compulsory subject. But, for regular schools like my school, it is too hard for the students. I mean, the students in my school are not fluent in Bahasa Indonesia, because they are still influenced by Javanese language (their mother tongue).

Teacher D views that the policy is compatible for the condition of their region. The need of acquiring and using English is not urgently felt for the region. Therefore, the locals (local government, school, society, etc.) decide what knowledge is more needed for the local context.

The exploration of the teachers’ perspective also reveals some problems that the teachers face so far. Six teachers stated that time allocation is a problem for them. With limited allocation of time in the curriculum scheme, the teacher cannot explore the material they want to give. Teacher H expressed her reasons as stated below:

If we look at the time allocation, I don’t think it's sufficient enough for them to learn English. Grade 1, 2 is only for 35 minutes, while grade 3 to 6 is only 70 minutes, per week. I mean language should be learned through repetition and drilling to make them (learners) remember.

Teacher H insists that studying language needs repetitive and drilling exercises. Teacher H’s belief shows the habit formation
perspective of learning a language. It is quite the same as Harmer (2007) who states that “the more the students come across to the language (English), the more repeated encounters they have with it, the better chance they have remembering and being able to use it” (p. 56). In the elementary school level, the time allocation for an English lesson ranges between 35 minutes to 70 minutes per week. Teacher H feels that this allocation of time does not provide the students to high exposure of English and English practice. Thus, she and the other 5 teachers strongly suggest schools to allocate more additional time outside the class, so they can explore more activities with their students.

Since there is no fixed national syllabus for English lesson in elementary school level, teachers often struggle with the process and implementation of the teaching of English at this level. These teachers, therefore, suggest the establishment of English language teacher support group specifically for elementary school level. Teacher E gives her best response towards this problem:

KKG (Subject Matter Teachers Group) is important to hold although it concerns with a local content subject matter level. Even bahasa Jawa [Javanese] lesson already has its own KKG. In this KKG meeting, we can share teaching activities, materials, and others. If it is held as a routine, we can make syllabus and semester tests and decide the standard together, so we won’t be alone in doing these.

Teacher E (as well as other 7 teachers) has a very positive opinion about this subject matter teachers meeting (KKG: Kelompok Kerja Guru). KKG is very important as a media for sharing and learning. This teachers meeting is usually held by the local government periodically. However, the government do not held KKG for local content subject matters such as English, Javanese, and others. The teachers view KKG as a place where they discuss all related aspects in the process of teaching and learning at the elementary school level. These teachers use this meeting to:

1. Find out and compare the time allocation for English lesson in each school [because each school has different time allocation for each class]
2. Share the teaching materials
3. Design English lesson syllabus for all elementary schools in Ambarawa

4. Design the test standardization.

5. Discuss and confirm the assessment standard for school examination

By establishing teacher's meeting, English teachers in elementary school hope to be able to work together with teachers from different schools. A standardized syllabus and test seems to be very important for the teachers. The teacher's meeting is hoped to enable teachers to produce a kind of guidelines for the process of English teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

The teachers' narratives show that they are highly aware of the need to learn English in the early age. This can be seen from their beliefs that learning English should start in early years of schooling. They believe that English is highly needed in order to follow the globalization era. Learning English in elementary school level will help to prepare the students for following English lesson in higher level (junior high school). In their practice, the teachers teach their students by considering aspects that support the success of learning English. They consider the cognitive development of the students at different grades in elementary school level and adjust the materials accordingly and the need of gaining students' interest toward English through creative teaching. These teachers welcome the policy (English as a local content subject in the elementary school level) in their teaching context. Some think that the policy is suitable with the condition of their region as a suburb area, in which learning English is not urgently needed. Some other teachers are more directed and focused on the need of learning English at early age regardless the status of English in their context.

The teachers in Ambarawa also pose some challenges that they face in teaching English as a local content subject matter. Firstly, there is no media for English teachers to meet and learn since the local government does not provide any official KKG for English teachers and syllabus guidelines. Secondly, teachers feel
that there is little time allocation for the English lesson in class (35-70 minutes for 1 meeting in a week). The teachers feel that learning a foreign language should be done frequently and repeatedly. Lastly, some teachers pointed out employment status as a challenge that needs to be taken into consideration by the government in implementing English as a local content subject matter in the elementary school level since the position as English teachers in elementary school is not well-secured. Therefore, the implementation of English as a local content subject matter needs to consider the time allocation and facilities, the need of establishing subject matter teachers’ group, and also the need to provide a secured-working condition for English subject teachers.

As the final remark, we would like to remind our readers that this study focuses on one teaching context in a small area like Ambarawa. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all teaching contexts in Indonesia. It is hoped that this study can encourage more studies to be conducted at other teaching contexts in which the needs for English is higher in order to understand various contextualized English teaching in Indonesia.

REFERENCES


