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The Urgency of English Teaching in Private Primary School: Stakeholders' Perceptions

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui persepsi pemangku kepentingan tentang urgensi pengajaran bahasa Inggris di sekolah dasar, meskipun bahasa Inggris tidak termasuk sebagai mata pelajaran wajib dalam kurikulum nasional pendidikan dasar. Pendekatan kualitatif diterapkan pada desain penelitian deskriptif ini. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui kuesioner dan wawancara semi-terkonstruksi. Sampel penelitian ini terdiri dari 12 guru dan 12 orang tua siswa dari 4 sekolah dasar dengan wilayah demografi yang berbeda. Temuan diambil dari analisis mendalam data dan tinjauan literatur yang relevan pada penelitian. Hasil studi ini menunjukkan bahwa para pemangku kepentingan memiliki persepsi yang sama bahwa bahasa Inggris harus diajarkan sejak sekolah dasar karena merupakan masa keemasan mereka untuk belajar banyak hal. Temuan penelitian ini juga mengungkapkan bahwa mata pelajaran bahasa Inggris perlu diajarkan di sekolah dasar karena ada banyak keuntungan belajar bahasa Inggris sejak dini.

Kata Kunci: English for Young Learners; National Curriculum; English Teaching; Primary Students.

Abstract

This research is aimed to find out the stakeholders' perception regarding the urgency of English teaching in primary school, although English is not included as mandatory in the national curriculum at the primary education level. A qualitative approach was applied to the design of this descriptive study. The data were collected through questionnaires and semi-constructed interviews. The sample of this research consists of 12 teachers and 12 parents from 4 primary schools with different demographic areas. The findings were drawn out from depth analysis of data and a review of relevant pieces of literature on the research. It showed that the stakeholders have the same perception that English should be taught since primary school because it was their golden age to learn many things. It was also in agreement that English subject needed to be taught in primary school since there are numerous advantages to learning English at an early age.

Keywords: Bahasa Inggris untuk Pembelajaran Muda; Kurikulum nasional; Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris; Siswa Sekolah Dasar.

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INTRODUCTION

According to central government policy, English was the first foreign language required to be taught in junior and senior high school. It is prioritized over other foreign languages like French, Arabic, Chinese, and others (Dardjowidjojo, 2000). However, teaching English to students in Indonesian primary schools has become a problem because of several changing policies in the English teaching curriculum (Jazadi, 2008).

English as a foreign language is essential to be learned from an early age, especially for the students in primary school. According to Sepyanda (2017), primary school students as young learners need to get English as one of the subjects because they are interested in learning new things such as English commonly used in daily life. They have to learn English in line with *Bahasa Indonesia*, their first language. Therefore, even though it is essential to take English as one of the subjects in the Elementary School curriculum, several considerations should be properly discussed. Zein (2019) stated that parents in Indonesia would only enroll their children in schools that offer English instruction. They were aware that as the world becomes more globalized, a strong foundation in English education will be critical in the coming years. Additionally, Chodijah in Zein (2019) stated that parents believed in the importance of English Primary education for early language acquisition; they believed that 'the earlier, the better' and the value of an early start and the benefits it provided to children as they learned to acquire a foreign language.

Abdukadyrova and Suyunova (2019) also stated that Primary School was the right level to introduce English as a foreign language because primary school was the students' golden age. In the golden age – when children can learn almost anything – the teaching and learning of English in elementary school would develop students' English language competencies, referred to as linguistic competence and linguistic performance. According to Chomsky in Clark and Clark (1977, linguistic competence refers to an individual's ability to use a language, whereas linguistic performance refers to the actual application of this ability in speaking or listening. As a result, learning a subject in the following school levels would be considered easier if learned from an early age. Adults might be faster and more rapid in attaining the language, but children's ultimate level of attainment is more remarkable in the final stage of learning. In short, children's natural talent for absorbing foreign languages should not be ignored.

However, English was only recognized as a local content subject in primary school in Indonesia up to the last type of curriculum, namely KTSP (Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pelajaran). Schools could only take it as an elective subject. Then, the current K-13 curriculum (Kurikulum 2013) finally removed English subjects from primary schools and left them only as part of extracurricular subjects (Sepyanda, 2017).

Mulyasa in Nur and Madkur (2014) mentioned some changes in the 2013 primary curriculum that distinguish it from the previous curriculum. They were: (1) It is based on Thematic-integrative. The theme would guide the learning-teaching process, and some subjects are combined into one based theme; (2) There were eight subjects. While the previous curriculum included ten subjects. The ten subjects that were reduced to eight in the 2013 curriculum were: religion, math, Indonesian language, social, science, civic education, arts and skills (local content), and physical education (local content); (3) Boy scouts was an adequate extracurricular activity; (4) The learning period would be extended, and longer; (5) English was only offered as an extracurricular subject.

These several changes have brought us to the issue of teaching English to young learners. Sahiruddin (2013) stated that the teacher would find several obstacles in dealing with such issues by lacking a national English Curriculum for Primary School. The teacher developed their curriculum for English subjects without the guidance of a standardized curriculum because of the changing policy of the national curriculum. It would make the English teaching process in primary school less optimal.

Meanwhile, the importance of English teaching for young learners keeps being stated in several studies. Damar et al. (2013) found that English teacher trainers argue that language education would be better from

primary school and even earlier, such as pre-school. They also emphasized the importance of appropriate assessment techniques and methods that are appropriate for the child's cognitive, emotional, and physical development. In addition, Supriyanti (2012) conducted a study to determine why children in primary school need to learn English. It was discovered that children need to learn English in primary school for various reasons. There was a widespread belief that children are better than adults at learning a new language. Economic globalization has influenced the need to use English, such as the requirement for workers to speak English fluently (Oktaviani & Fauzan, 2017). It emerged the parents' eagerness to have their children learn English from an early age, including in terms of enhancing social and economic benefits. Therefore, some of them are willing to find other ways to ensure that their children can understand English well, such as sending their children to expensive English courses.

In other studies, Sepyanda (2017) gave an overview of the importance of English subjects in the primary school curriculum. It was found that primary school students as young learners need to get English as one of their school subjects because they have a high interest in learning new things such as English that are commonly used in daily life. However, providing teachers and schools with clear and appropriate standards for teaching English at an early stage also needs deep consideration. It is hoped that an appropriate and nationally standardized English curriculum will facilitate teachers and schools in teaching English in accordance with students' needs and capacities.

Therefore, the researchers are interested in analyzing the urgency of English teaching in primary school according to stakeholders' perceptions. Hence, to ensure the objective, this research presented a research question: What is the stakeholders' perception about the urgency of English teaching in primary school?

METHOD

The present study used qualitative research that concentrates on the design of the descriptive study. The qualitative method has several points: the study of a problem, a detailed understanding of a phenomenon, a word-based collection of information, a text analysis of the data for description, and an interpretation of the more significant meaning of the results (Creswell, 2012). Similarly, Alwasilah (2002) mentioned that qualitative research aims to examine events or phenomena critically.

In addition, according to Sandelowski (2000), a descriptive study enables a realistic approach to inquiry, resulting in a meaningful summary of the data in everyday language. Moreover, Merriam in Stenberg and Maaranen (2020) stated that a descriptive research design was selected to recognize the phenomenon by collecting data directly from respondents. Hence, this research aims to discover stakeholders' perceptions of the urgency of English teaching in private primary schools. The data from this study will be collected through the distribution of open-ended questions and interviews. The result of the questionnaires and the interview with the participant will be described to answer the research questions.

This research was conducted on 4 private primary schools in four different areas in Indonesia. Those schools were considered to have more or less the same level, including students' economic background. Selecting people who participate in the research is essential for conducting research. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants and was applied purposively subjective in deciding on these respondents to check their validity and how they can affect research (Harding, 2013). Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling process that takes samples with special features compatible with the study's purposes (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2015). The consent from the head of the private primary school was also used as a recommendation to select the participants, which consisted of teachers and parents of students from those four schools.

A questionnaire and a semi-constructed interview were given to the participants to collect the data. A questionnaire was a data collection technique consisting of questions to gather participant information. The questionnaire was given through a Google format online questionnaire, both in the form of closed and open

format. The questionnaire was given in Bahasa Indonesia to avoid misunderstandings among stakeholders in replying to the questions. The questionnaire was divided into three categories: teacher, student, and parent.

Table 1
The Indicator of stakeholders' questionnaire about their perception of the urgency in English Teaching Primary School

Variable	Component	Indicator	Item
The stakeholders' perception of the urgency of English teaching in Primary School	The teachers' perception	The teachers' perception of English teaching in Private primary school	2
		The teachers' perception of the deletion of English subjects in the national curriculum for primary school	1
		The teachers' perception of the importance of English teaching in Primary School	1
		The teachers' perception of their suggestion of an educational system related to English teaching in primary school	1
	The parents' perception	The parents' perception of English teaching in Primary School	1
		The parents' perception of the deletion of English subject in the national curriculum for primary school	2
		The parents' perception of the importance of English teaching in Primary School	2
		The parents' perception of their suggestion of an educational system related to English teaching in primary school	1

The second was an interview. The interview served to discover more about stakeholders' perceptions and support the questionnaire answer. The interview allowed the researchers to listen for a time to the participants' opinions or experiences and asked the research questions for additional ideas (Harding, 2013). In this research, the WhatsApp call interview has conducted to interview the stakeholders. A semi-structured interview was selected to gather the responses of stakeholders.

Both data were analyzed after collecting the questionnaire and the interview information. The model has a range of analysis components, like data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Firstly, the data reduction concerns the selection, concentration, and summary process of raw information from interviews, observations, documents, or other qualitative data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The researchers were concerned about selecting which parts of the interview transcript should be included.

The first step was the display of data. The selected data were presented in this phase in essays, which showed that the data were intended to help the researchers understand and consider what was going on in the presented data. Data from the interview in this study were submitted in narrative form. The conclusion was drawing and checking. The researcher concluded after displaying the data based on the research questions. The data in this study must be verified for credibility and precision using triangulation. Triangulation is a means of verifying data from several sources, like various participants, data types, and data collection methods (Creswell, 2012). The researchers evaluated several sources, such as a questionnaire response and a response to the interview, as much as possible to obtain a valid finding in this research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings in this current research related to the stakeholder's perception of the urgency of English teaching in private primary schools. There were 12 teachers and 12 parents as the stakeholders. This finding focused on the indicators of the instrument:

The teacher perception

1. The teachers' perception of English teaching in Primary School

Teachers still find several challenges in English teaching, where they find it was not easy to find and determine the methods and the techniques that are suitable to use in English teaching. As one teacher said:

English learning is still very challenging because we as teachers must be able to determine the right methods and media to attract enthusiastic students and make it easier for students to understand the material.

(Teacher 1, School 1)

2. The teachers' perception of the deletion of English subjects in the national curriculum for primary school

In general, teachers do not agree with the changes in the English curriculum in primary schools because they think that education starting at an early age will produce better results than those that do not. They also stated that it would also help them create a generation that is ready to face globalization and the rapid pace of technology. This is in line with one of the teachers' statements in one of those private primary schools:

I can't entirely agree because this change will make the students find it difficult to learn English subjects at the junior high level, where they have to start all over again. We are already having difficulties teaching English, especially those who do not have the slightest basic provisions that should be taught at the primary level.

(Teacher 1, School 3)

3. The teachers' perception of the importance of English teaching in Primary School

Teachers' perceptions of the importance of teaching English in primary schools were very similar. They stated that teaching English is important because students need to learn it very early. They also argued that students would find it difficult to learn English in high school without teaching English.

English is as important as other subjects, where children must already know the basics of English from a young age because it will be beneficial to learn it at the next school level.

(Teacher 1, School 2)

Because English is an important language nowadays, teaching English needs to be taught since primary school. Hence, the children who do not know basic English would not know how to begin to recognize and learn basic things in English.

(Teacher 1, School 4)

4. The teachers' perception of their suggestion of an educational system related to English teaching in primary school

The teachers hoped that the government would help teachers improve the English teaching process in primary schools by providing facilities and a standardized curriculum to develop English language teaching easily.

Curriculum changes that make English become an extracurricular subject is an inappropriate action. It is better to improve the methods and facilities than to make it become an extracurricular subject.

(Teacher 1, School 2)

The parents' perception

1. The parents' perception of English teaching in Primary School

There are many methods and strategies to teach English in primary school that can be used to attract students' interest. However, due to an unclear curriculum and many types of school-made or teachers-made syllabi, the English learning material was hardly appropriate for primary school. Therefore, the students still had difficulties comprehending the material.

Because my child is in first grade, I assume that English material is still insufficient because it is difficult to understand, particularly in light of the distance learning pandemic.

(Parents 1, School 1)

2. The parents' perception of the deletion of English subject in the national curriculum for primary school

Almost all the parents did not know that the English subject had been deleted from the national curriculum for primary school, and they were amazed when they were informed about it. English is an essential subject in primary school that should be taught from the beginning, and they need the government to support their perspective. One of the students' parents stated that:

The government should pay more attention to the English Subject in Primary School since the students can quickly get the basics of a language in the golden age.

(Parent 1, School 4)

3. The parents' perception of the importance of English teaching in Primary School

The parents revealed that English Teaching in Primary Schools was essential since English is beneficial for their children's language development. Therefore, it is essential to be taught English since Primary school.

It is important to teach English in Primary school because it will benefit language development.

(Parent 1, School 2)

Furthermore, English teaching since Primary School showed some advantages for the children. Almost all parents stated that their children would be more confident in applying English in daily life, and it will be beneficial for their social development.

It is beneficial to increase the students' academic skills. In addition, mastery of English can help them advance in their careers, expand their relationships, and use the internet to support information or communication, which will be easier if they have known English since primary school.

(Parents 1, school 1)

As a result, children become more confident in learning English at the next level (junior high school) because they have had provisions since primary school.

(Parents 2, school 2)

4. The parents' perception of their suggestion of an educational system related to English teaching in primary school

Related to the deletion of English in the curriculum, the students' parents also suggested the English national curriculum, which did not exist in primary school. They argued that today's English class in primary school was not exactly as their expected. According to one of the students' parents:

The education system in Indonesia would need to be reorganized so that children are not overburdened with subjects. Especially in English, the material taught must emphasize vocabulary mastery to use in daily conversation.

(Parents 2, school 1)

English teaching to primary students is different from junior or senior high school students. English teaching in primary school has been challenging for the teacher. Primary students are children between 7 and 12 (Slattery & Willis, 2001). They have unique characteristics and needs. In line with Cahyati and Madya (2019), primary students are ego-centered, imaginative, active, easily bored, and have difficulty differentiating between things. They also have a low concentration level, prefer to do their tasks independently, and love learning new material. So, teachers have to pay close attention to particular teaching principles. Moreover, teaching English to primary students involves more than just language skills. As a result, teachers must support primary students' emotional, physical, social, and intellectual development to improve their English skills (Brown, 2001).

Related to the teachers' challenges in teaching English to primary students, they also found difficulties designing their curriculum. In contrast, many educators and teachers have pushed for the involvement of local authorities in curriculum design due to the policy of a decentralized system (Sahiruddin, 2013). It prevents them

from having inappropriate material guidelines for primary school students. Teachers would face significant obstacles in achieving the goal due to the English local content topic position, which requires them to produce, modify, and arrange their learning materials independently (Mutiah, Nakhriyah, Husna, Hidayat, & Hamid, 2020).

Similarly, Sulistiyo et al. (2020) mentioned no national curricular rules for English as a local topic for primary school students. As a result, parents also criticized the deletion of English subjects in the primary school's national curriculum. The parents thought that English was still difficult for primary students, and they wanted their children's language skills to grow. Thus, studying English has rules that are appropriate for primary school students.

Although parents criticized the lack of proper norms of English teaching in primary schools, the finding showed that teaching English from the beginning, especially from the primary level, is essential. It is accompanied by the results of the interviews and questionnaires that have been conducted. The teacher stated that the students in primary school are in the golden age, which is easy to catch new information. According to Lightbown and Spada (1999), children have a superior ability to acquire language sets or units since they are in a golden age period due to the plasticity and purity of their brains. Similarly, Singleton and Ryan (2004) also examined that those who start studying English at an early age are more likely to reach higher levels of achievement than those who start later in life. Moreover, children learn second languages better than adults (Johnson & Newport, 1989).

Related to the teachers' perception above, the parents also stated numerous advantages to learning English beginning in primary school. The children can speak English with self-confidence in everyday situations, and self-confidence is one of the most critical factors motivating students to learn (Cahyati & Madya, 2019). The findings showed that the students would be more confident to use English in the next level or Junior High School. It was related to the researchers' experience teaching English to Junior High School students. Students who have studied English since primary school and those who have not are pretty different. Similarly, Moon (2005) mentioned that students have sufficient knowledge of English early, and they will be more confident to start expressing the English language in their daily life. It means that students will have English background knowledge since primary school, so they will be more confident to learn English in Junior High School.

Furthermore, the parents stated that students who start learning English in primary school would have a positive social development and a bright future. They will be able to access information from the internet more quickly if they have studied English since primary school, especially in this digital age. It is supported by Sepyanda (2017) that students who have mastered English can browse any website with the help of their parents. She also said that this circumstance would assist students in obtaining further information and knowledge that will aid their learning. Moreover, Oktaviani and Fauzan (2017) mentioned that primary school students would aid socially and economically in learning English in the future.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to investigate the urgency of English teaching in private primary schools. The purposes were to determine the stakeholders' perception of the urgency of English teaching in primary school. Using a qualitative design, the researchers have drawn on participants' perceptions of the urgency of English teaching in private primary schools. The findings suggested a need to look back into the importance of English teaching in primary school. At the same time, the education stakeholders stated that the deletion of English subjects in primary school only has one side effect, which makes the educational objectives more challenging and difficult to accomplish, especially in language education. It can be concluded that the deletion of the English curriculum in private primary schools contradicts the stakeholders' perception of the urgency of English teaching in private primary schools. However, further studies were still needed. The different areas with unique

features and needs, the students' socio-economic background, and the types of primary schools may provide different findings.

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