

THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH SUBJECT IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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Abstract

The curriculum changes in Indonesia bring another problem for English subject in Elementary school. The subject can not be found in *Kurikulum 2013* (K-13), while it was one of subjects stated in previous curriculum known as KTSP. It becomes current issue in education area. Some people agree that English subject should not be included as subject for Elementary School students, because it is more important for the students to learn *Bahasa Indonesia* as first and national language.. In other hand, some people state that it is important because English is international language that should be learnt by everyone in the world. Then, Elementary School is the right level to start introducing English as foreign language because of the students' golden age. They will get easier to learn this subject in the next school levels. In fact, English as foreign language is very important to be learnt since early age especially for the students in Elementary School. They have to learn English in line with *Bahasa Indonesia* that being learnt as their first language. Elementary School students as young learners need to get English as one of subject in their school, because they have high interest in learning new things such as English that starting commonly used in daily life. So, it is important to take English as one of subject in Elementary School curriculum with several considerations.

Key words/phrases: curriculum changes, young learner, elementary school, EFL

A. INTRODUCTION

English is not a new subject for the students at schools. Recent years, the students have learnt English since they was at Elementary School.. Some of them already known English since they was at kindergarten. The reason is simple; it is caused of the identity of English as international language. The use of English as global language has affected point of view of many people that make them want to learn English, at least for communication purpose.

In addition, we can find many English terms that have been already used in any aspects of our life. One of the simple examples is advertisement that usually English terms to make their products become more interesting. It shows us that English is not only found at schools as a subject but it is also discovered indirectly

in daily life through various media. So, that is why many people ask their children to learn English earlier because of the communication purpose.

Recently, English subject that is usually found in elementary school curriculum is disappeared. It does not belong to one of subjects taught at Elementary School anymore like in KTSP (*Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pelajaran*), the previous curriculum. *Kurikulum 13* (K-13) focuses on the use Bahasa Indonesia as national language, where some communities think that *Bahasa Indonesia* is more important to be taught at Elementary School than English as foreign language. However, this curriculum still has weakness that should be evaluated and revised in order to reach the best education goals.

In KTSP, English subject for Elementary School students was stated clearly through the brief content that let the students to learn the four basic skills like listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It was categorized as *Muatan Lokal* where the students learnt English once a week. Eventhough, it was allocated in limited time, teaching English at Elementary School is really helpful for the students when they start entering Junior High School. It is caused of the basic material that they have learnt in Elementary School.

Teaching English in Elementary School is more concerned with the upper level, grade four until six. The students are engaged with the four basic skills. Meanwhile, for the lower level, it tends to introduce the students with vocabulary. It depends on the school policy whether the students in lower level get English as their subject or not. At least, through learning English in Elementary School as *Muatan Lokal*, the students had known English for their starting before entering Junior High School that have more complicated material.

The situation is really different from *Kurikulum 2013* (K-13) that do not take English as one important subject that should be taught at Elementary School. The students do not learn English at Elementary School anymore. They may learn English as extracurricular where there is no specific time allocation and the students do not have to take the subject. In fact, English as international language is an interesting subject that should be learnt by the students even some of them think that English is not important subject.

There are several reasons why teaching English at Elementary School is important. First, it is widely use as global language that covers many aspects of

life. Second, Elementary School students as young learners are the best phase to learn English as foreign language. Then, it will help the students easier to learn English as the main subject in the next school levels.

Based on the explanation above, it can be seen that English is important to be taught at Elementary School. Whereas, it is not included in *Kurikulum 13* (K-13) as subject that should be learnt by the students at Elementary School on their primary schedule. Logically, it should be stated in the national curriculum eventhough it is not our first or second language. The students need to be introduced with English as foreign language that become more frequently used in daily life. Thus, this paper would like to give an overview about the importance of English subject in Elementary School curriculum.

B. REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

1. English for Young Learners

a. Concept of Young Learners

Elementary School students can be categorized as young learners, because they are in the early ages that start from six until twelve years old. Most of students in Indonesia start entering Elementary School when they are six years old. This age is considered as the right phase to learn formally at school.

Suyanto (2008) states that young learners are the students in Elementary School have age between 6-12 years old. It means that students who have entered Elementary School can be categorized as young learners; where they are starting to learn material that has been designed for their ages.

Young learners consist of two group, they are young group (6-8 years old) and older group (9-12 years old). While based on their class, it can be called as lower classes student that includes grade one until three and upper class includes grade four until six. Commonly, English in Elementary School is learnt by the students in Upper classes.

According to Scott and Ytreberg (2004), the young language learners have divided the children into two main groups; the five to seven year olds and the eight to ten year olds. There are the five to seven year olds are all at level one, the beginner stage. The eight to ten

year olds may also be beginners. It seems different from starting age in Indonesia that

Moreover, Purwaningsih in Prasetya (2011) says that young learners are students in Elementary School that are 9-10 years old who are learning English as foreign language. In other words, young learners are students of Elementary School. Specifically, it refers to students who learn English in upper class..

Based on the statements above, it can be seen that there are various point of view about the age in categorizing the students as young learners. However, it has same opinion that young learners are Elementary School students. So, it can be said that young learners are students of Elementary School who has age around 6-12 years old.

b. Characteristics of Young Learners

Elementary school students are learners that can imitate something easily, such as language. In learning a language, the students need an environment surrounded by targeted language that is meaningful because of the context and because of the way the teacher speak to them. In teaching young learners, teachers should know their characteristics in order to have simplicity in understanding them. The characteristics cover their ways of thinking, attitude, aptitude, and learning language.

Brumfit (1991) gives a list of the characteristics of young learners. First, young learners are just starting their learning at school, so that teachers have a major opportunity to mold their expectations of life in school. Second, they are potentially more differentiated than secondary or adult learners, because they are closer to their varied home cultures. Third, they tend to be keen and enthusiastic learners. Fourth, their learning can be closely linked with their development of ideas and concepts, because it is so close to their initial experiences of formal learning. Last, they need physical movement and activity as much as stimulation for their thinking.

Halliwell (1992) clarifies several characteristics of children as young learners. First, they are already very good in interpreting

meaning without necessarily understanding the individual word. Next, they already have great skill in using limited language creativity. Then, they frequently learn indirectly rather than directly. After that, they also take good pleasure in finding and creating fun in what they do. Last, they have a complete imagination, children words are full of imagination and fantasy, and it is more than simply matter of enjoyment.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that the characteristics of young learners are very different from adult learners. They are very active and need to be stimulated through physical activities. They are also easily interested new things that they had never known before. Because of that, teaching English as foreign language is something unique for them. Teachers need to be creative and have big challenge in teaching and learning process.

2. Curriculum Changes in Indonesia

a. Concept of Curriculum

Curriculum is a part that has role to reach the national education goals. It takes important role in guiding the teachers and related stakeholders to achieve the goals. Curriculum also can be used to predict expected outcomes of teaching because it shows what things need to be learned and what activities should be experienced by students.

Curriculum in Indonesia refers to a set of planning and organization of aim, content, and learning material as the guidance to learning activity to achieve a particular educational objective (Republic of Indonesia law, no.20 year 2003). It means that curriculum is resources to achieve educational goals, as well as guidance in the implementation of education. It contains specific guidance for the components of education in implementing the educational purposes.

Hamalik (2009) explains that curriculum contains teaching and learning material that can be used as learning experience. Activities included in curriculum are not only limited inside of the classroom, it is also reach activities in outside. In other words, curriculum gives

specific action in planning the teaching and learning process in order to achieve the education objectives.

Modebelu (2015) states that curriculum is a total guided learning experiences designed to facilitate learners learning for establishing quality relationship between what is learnt and what operates outside the school. Through using curriculum as the guidance, the school can facilitate the students to reach their learning objectives. It also help the teachers in designing the learning experience for the students.

So, curriculum is a set of lessons and academic content used to be taught in a school. Curriculum refers to the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn, which includes the learning standards or learning objectives they are expected to meet and other components related to the teaching and learning process.

b. The History of Indonesia Curriculum

In the course of history since 1945, the national curriculum has undergone changes, namely in 1947, 1952, 1964, 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2006. The changes are a logical consequence of the change of political system, socio-cultural, economic, science and technology in society and nation. Therefore, the education curriculum as a set of plans should be developed dynamically in accordance with the demands and changes taking place in society. Most of national curriculum was designed based on the same foundation, namely *Pancasila* and the 1945 Constitution, the difference in emphasis of the basic education goals and approaches to make it happen.

Herliyati in Saputri (2014) explains that after Indonesian independence in the implementation of educational curricula known several times that a simple curriculum (1947-1964), curriculum reform (1968 and 1975), the skills-based curriculum (1984 and 1994), and competency-based curriculum (2004 and 2006). In 2004, the curriculum was known as *Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi (KBK)*.. Then, it became *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP)* in 2006.

In KBK and KTSP, the school was given full authority in the education plan with reference to the standards set, ranging from the purpose, vision, mission, structure and content of the curriculum, the burden of learning, education calendar to syllabus development..

Recently, the newest curriculum is known as *Kurikulum 2013* (K-13) where it is recognized through the teaching and learning process that is thematic-integrative. *Kurikulum 2013* is designed to reach the education goals on the students who will be ready to face the future with competence included attitudes, knowledge, and skills that integrated with manner.

So, curriculum has change following the education development. The changes can affect a particular component, but may also be related to all components of the curriculum. Curriculum change involves various factors, both those involved in education and supporting factors in the implementation of education. As a consequence, the curriculum changes curriculum will also lead to changes in the implementation of the curriculum, both for people involved in the education and other supporting factors in curriculum implementation.

c. English Subject in Indonesia Curriculum

English is learnt as foreign language by the students at schools. According to Purwaningsih (2014), the development of curriculum in Indonesia, especially for English subject, can be categorized into several periods; they are curriculum 1975, curriculum 1986, curriculum 1994, *Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi* (KBK) and *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan* (KTSP). On the previous curriculum, English has been introduced to be taught at schools. Especially in Elementary School, it was begins since the implementation of *Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi* (KBK). It became more intense when KTSP implemented where the Elementary School students got English as subject known as *Muatan Lokal*.

Kemendiknas (2003) states that there are three goals of the English teaching in KTSP. First, it means to develop communicative

ability in the target language, both in oral and written form. Communicative ability consists of listening skill, speaking skill, reading skill, and writing skill. Second, it means to stimulate students' awareness of the importance of the mastery of English as a foreign language. Last, it means to develop students' understanding toward the relation between language and culture and shaping the knowledge of culture, so that students will have an insight of cross cultural understanding, which enables them to engage in diverse sociocultural contexts. It is clear that the main target of the curriculum is mainly developing students' intercultural communicative competence.

Masduqi (2012) explain that curriculum development in Indonesia is always up to date in catching up the development of English teaching theories in the world. The emphases that are stated in the recent curriculum clearly indicate the understanding of what communicative competence is and how the approach sees language teaching in foreign language contexts. In other words, it is still relevant with the development of current theories and practices in teaching English as foreign language.

Now, since Kurikulum 2013 (K-13) has been implemented, English is not taught in Elementary School subject. It does not belong to primary time allocation where it depends on the school policy to take English as extracurricular subject or not. In other words, the development of teaching English as foreign language in Elementary School has stopped.

C. DISCUSSION

Implementing *Kurikulum 2013* (K-13) that change KTSP (*Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pelajaran*) becomes problem for several subjects that usually included on the primary schedule. English is one of subjects that not included on this new curriculum, whereas it had been taught as a subject for Elementary School students. This change brings various impacts toward the related stakeholders. That is why this problem becomes current issue in education area.

Some people who agree with this situation have two tough reasons for shifting the position of English as a subject in Elementary School. First, it concerns about

increasing the cognitive burden of students. If the students ask to learn English on their early learning, they may get more difficulties where other subject such as Math is more complicated for them. They need to focus on basic subjects that should be learnt at Elementary School.

The other reason is related to the concern that Elementary School students are not focused on learning the national language (Bahasa Indonesia). English as foreign language should not be taught in Elementary School, because teaching Bahasa Indonesia is more important for the students. In addition, it is related to their nationality where the students should pay more attention to Bahasa Indonesia as their first language.

However, those reasons above can not be used to make English not important to be taught for the Elementary School students. There are several reasons why English should be included as a subject in Elementary School. First, English has being learnt widely by most of people in the world. It is most commonly used in communicating around the world. It is also used as the first language in many countries and several countries use English as second language. So, it is important for the students in Elementary School to be introduced with English as foreign language.

In addition, English is mostly used in publishing books, making films, music and a lot of entertaining things. As we know, most of the children as Elementary School students get entertainment through movies and musics where several of them, especially the popular movies and music, use English. The popularity is higher than movies and musics that use Bahasa Indonesia. Absolutely, the students want to know and understand what they watch and listen.

Furthermore, most of Elementary School students are familiar with internet and they really know how to access it. Almost more than 50% of the information on the internet is available in English. Through mastering English, the students can access in any website easily with several consideration and guidance from their parents. This condition will help the students to get more information and knowledge that support their learning.

Because of the role of English as global language, it is importance to introduce English as foreign language to the Elementary School students since they are in early age. The earlier they know the new language, the easier they get the

language. This is also related with critical period hypothesis that has gained a lot of attention over the last several decades. This idea states that Elementary School students as young learners are able to learn a new language with greater ease than older learners. It means that Elementary School is the right level to start introducing English as foreign language because of the students' golden age.

Moreover, the students who have learnt English in Elementary School will get easier to learn this subject in their next school levels. As we can see, English is also being taught at high school level where the material is conceptually more complicated.

In addition, the students have high interest in learning new things such as English that starting commonly used in daily life where most of media use English terms. As an example is advertisement, especially ads that promotes children's needs. Most of them use English terms to make their products become more popular. It makes the children as the learners want to know about the terms. So, English need to be learnt by the students in Elementary School as concrete material.

However, it needs several considerations to take English as one of subject in Elementary School curriculum. The main one is material that will be learnt by the students. The material should be adjusted with their need and do not force them with abstract material that will be difficult for them. In addition, teaching English as foreign language in Elementary school does not mean to make learning Bahasa Indonesia become less important. As while the students learn Bahasa Indonesia as their first or national language, their also can learn English to expand their knowledge.

D. CONCLUSION

Kurikulum2013 (K-13) had replaced KTSP as previous curriculum that include English as one of subjects that should be in Elementary School. It becomes polemic issue because English has known as global language that being learnt by most people in the world. English subject is important to be learnt by the students since they are in Elementary School because it will help them in learning English easier on the next school levels. Beside that, English has widely use in their daily life. Most of aspects in their life use English that need their understanding. So, its important to include English as one of subjects in

Elementary school curriculum with several consideration related to the material and students' need.

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