

AN ENGLISH TEACHER'S PERCEPTION ON THE REMOVAL OF THE ENGLISH SUBJECT AT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

The removal of English in elementary schools in the 2013 Curriculum has surprised education practitioners in Indonesia, whereas English is an international language that needs to be taught to all students throughout Indonesia. The purpose of this study is to analyze an English teacher's perception on the removal of the English subject at elementary school in Cipatat. This research used a qualitative case study approach that focuses on individual experience through an interview. The results of this research explained that the removal of English made students not enthusiastic in learning English, which especially impacted on their lack of knowledge of vocabulary at the next level. Therefore, teachers must give more motivation to students despite their teaching load, and they must be more optimal and creative in teaching with limited time every week. On the other hand, as students in Indonesia tend to lack interest in reading, the removal of English at this level gives them an advantage, which is to make students increase their literacy and love their national language more.

Keywords: English, Elementary School, Teaching

INTRODUCTION

English has been recognized as an international language that should be learned by the public, so that they can communicate in the global world. Thus, English education that starts early is not something that can be underestimated. As we all know, English is a language that is definitely used by all people in the world. So, when we learn English, we will be able to adapt and talk with anyone easily when we move from one country to another. Therefore, by mastering the language which incidentally is the most common language in the world, it is our main capital to expand our relationships throughout the world. English is not only important in education, but is very useful for politics, economics, employment, and so on. It is thus not surprising that in English as a foreign language (EFL) countries, English begins to be introduced at elementary school.

In elementary school, education focuses more on cognitive, physical and social skills and academic development. Family and environmental influences in personal formation and skills are already universally recognized, but for the improvement and development of their skills as adults, they need to be guided towards optimal development through formal education, which begins at elementary school. Young language learners are able to make some decisions about their own learning and they have defined views about what they like and do not like doing (Penny McKay, 2008) as cited in Cahyati, Parmawati, & Atmawijaya (2019).

As children grow older, their analytical skills will be further developed. This would help children's cognitive, affective and psychomotor development continue to the next level of their education.

Cameron (2001, as cited in Jazuly & Indrayani, 2018) argues that children are born with a natural appetite and interest for learning, and their desire to learn should be fueled when they begin school. Psychologically, students aged 7-12 years old have a period of time referred to as middle childhood, which is a time suitable for learning language other than their mother tongue (first language). This is because the child's brain condition is still flexible, so they absorb language more easily, especially if the material is related to the language used as a means of communication. This idea is supported by Tarigan (1987, as cited in Firmansyah, 2018) who found that the speaking skills referred to by the researcher are a language skill that develops in a child's life, which is only preceded by listening skills, and at that time the ability to speak is learned.

According to Wallace (1992, as cited in AlNatour & Hijazi, 2018) educational institutions recognize the importance of English since it is an international channel of communication. This statement is supported by Aryana and Apsari (2018) who state that English is an international language that all countries in the world use, and that English also becomes a material for final examinations in Indonesia which all students have to pass. As a result, English is taught at schools and universities all over the world, and in some countries as a foreign or a second language. In Indonesia, the English subject was initiated with the Decree of the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture Number 060 Year 1993 by introducing it to fourth grade students in elementary school.

In teaching young language learners, Pinter (2006, as cited in Jazuly & Indrayani, 2018) points out a number of reasons why children can benefit from learning a foreign language. The reason is that it can develop children's basic communication skills in language. This communication ability needs to be stimulated and learned as early as possible. Harmer (2007, p. 67, as cited in Jazuly & Indrayani, 2018) states that "children's understanding comes not from the explanation, but from what they see and hear, and crucially, have a chance to touch and interact with." While in junior high school, their analytical skills lie on the linguistic side, where they learn and understand differences in structure, tenses, pronunciation, etc. In other words, if students start learning English at the junior high school level, they will have difficulty developing their cognitive skills and knowledge in English, especially in terms of communication. This idea is supported by Tomlinson (1985, as cited in Kuwat & Ghozali, 2018) who found that after learning English for six years, such students were not able to perform simple communication. Therefore, teaching English at the earlier stages will most likely help young learners establish language development which enables them to learn vocabulary and more developed conversational skills (Cameron, 2001, as cited in Simanjuntak, 2018).

According to Maili (2018), English at elementary school level was removed officially starting from the 2013/2014 school year by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) because it was considered a burden to students. The removal plan was carried out in stages until 2016/2017. Concurrently, the 2013 Curriculum makes the English subject an extracurricular activity (Yulia & Widyarini, 2018). This decision met oppositions from several schools in Indonesia, especially from English teachers. Based on this background, this research aims to analyze an Indonesian teacher's perception on the removal of the English subject in elementary schools.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative case study approach that typically focuses on small groups or individuals within a group and documents related to that group's or individual's experience in a specific setting. The data were collected through an interview with an English teacher from a public elementary school (SDN) in Cipatat, Bandung Barat, Indonesia. The reason the author only interviewed one teacher because the participant was English teacher from the best SDN in that area and she had long experience teaching. The second reason was the difficulty of interviewing many participants because of the impact of covid 19 that is happening at the moment. The interview contained five closed-ended questions concerning the teacher's perception and feelings, including about the advantages and disadvantages of removing the English subject from elementary school. Data analysis was carried out by reduction of the data obtained from the results of the interview with the participant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

In the interview, the speaker explained about her perception, feelings, and what she thought were the advantages and disadvantages of removing the English subject as follows.

First, the teacher explained that English should not be removed or changed into local content, because it can have effects on the student learning process. Students become less aware of the importance of learning English for their future, and they will find the material that will be given in junior high school later on difficult to understand.

Second, when she heard about the removal, she felt very disappointed because it easily changed an important lesson into an extracurricular subject. As a result, the teacher saw the students show less interest in learning English than in learning other subjects. Consequently, the teacher had to give more motivation to students in the learning process.

Third, according to the teacher's perception, the disadvantage of removing English is that students will not be trained more optimally to develop linguistic intelligence, which involves sensitivity to spoken and written language, the ability to learn languages, and the capacity to use language to accomplish certain goals (Gardner, 1999, as cited in Attamimi & Umarella, 2019). In other words, English vocabulary that students have will be very minimal and make them not ready to face English lessons at the next level, and that by changing it to extracurricular class hours are reduced to only one hour, which is less than optimal in teaching the material. Even sometimes the material which is supposed to be delivered for one semester cannot be fully conveyed by the English teacher.

Lastly, she conceded that, with the removal of English, hours of the Indonesian language subject were increased so that students can comprehend and love the Indonesian language. In other words, one expected advantage of this is to increase their literacy in reading, because the lack of student interest in reading becomes one of the reasons for removing English from elementary school.

Discussion

The removal of English in elementary school can also improve the language skills possessed by students in communication such as reading, speaking, listening and writing, i.e. literacy,

with the aim of their love for Indonesian. According Maili (2018) since the removal of English, the literacy rate of Indonesia in recent years has been increasing. However, several international survey results still suggest that literacy needs to be encouraged. According to Witanto (2018) stated that statistical data from UNESCO, from a total of 61 countries, Indonesia is ranked 60 with a low literacy rate. Rating 59 is filled in by Thailand and last place was filled by Botswana, if the average reading ability of OECD countries is 487, Indonesia's score is 371. The first score is China (555), then Singapore (549) and Macau (525) the result of Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018.

As stated by Wilson (2002, as cited in Yuliani et al., 2019), a limited amount of stress can have a positive impact on motivation and creativity of teachers, while excessive pressure can have a negative impact on them. This occurred to the participant, as the teacher felt very burdened when teaching in the class, because not only have her students lost their motivation in learning English, but the teacher herself has in teaching as well. As a result, the teacher has had to motivate herself in teaching English so that she could raise the interest of students in learning English for their readiness when learning English at the next level. In her perception, when the teacher is under pressure and burdened, the quality of teaching decreases.

Furthermore, in this case, the change or removal of English at elementary level had a negative impact, since the teacher had to face a less than optimal learning process due to the reduced hours of English and lack of student motivation in learning English. Not only did the students lack awareness in learning English, but their development of English knowledge was also not optimal, especially in increasing their vocabulary which can lead to their difficulties when learning English at the next level. Consequently, teachers have to make students more aware of the importance of learning English for their future and the teacher must be more creative and able to manage time to provide professional teaching with sufficient material in a small amount of time. This is supported by Maili (2018), who found that almost all English teachers wanted English to be included in the position of English as subjects, because the age period of 6 to 13 years is the language development period of children, in which they acquire language more easily because of the process of separating the functions of the left and right sides of the brain.

CONCLUSION

The decision of the government based on the 2013 Curriculum to remove English from elementary school was not seen as the right decision, because it contradicted the teacher's perspective that more negative impacts than positive ones result from this elimination. Teachers become less enthusiastic in teaching because of it, as they receive heavy pressure by only being given limited time to teach English. Furthermore, the situation in the classroom becomes one of the burdens of the teacher, where the students become increasingly less interested in learning English and less aware of its importance for future uses. Thus, teachers have to motivate themselves more to give motivation and enthusiasm to students and always make them aware of the importance of English for their future.

However, the teacher did not deny the positive impact of the removal of English in elementary school, as the teacher saw change in students' interest in reading, which in turn advanced their literacy. Students became more diligent in reading every day in the class, and their concern for Indonesian was increasing. Nevertheless, considering that the removal of English has more negative impacts than positive ones, English in elementary school should be reinstated for the benefit of students at the next level and in their future. Meanwhile, due to the limitations of this research, further research on this problem is suggested by involving several teachers in order to

optimize information gathered in the form of teachers' decisions and suggestions on the removal of English from elementary schools.

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