

# Primary school 8332

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## THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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### Abstract

At this time the role of English is very important in all areas of human life, especially in the field of education. The educational policy to introduce English at primary school age has been implemented. Many schools have included English as a local content subject in the school curriculum. And in learning the teacher uses English as the language of instruction "lingua franca". Therefore, this study aims to investigate how the learning process of an English teacher teaches English in primary schools and can contribute to an understanding of how elementary school teachers view English as one of the local content to equip students with English skills. The method used is a qualitative research method with data taken from interviews with 2 English teachers at private elementary schools in Sleman. The results obtained from this study are that teachers believe that the use of English can increase primary school students' interest in learning English but the perspectives and beliefs of each teacher are different.

**Keywords:** Primary School, English Language, Learning English

### INTRODUCTION

As a verbal communication tool, English is becoming more important in all areas of human life (Ahmadi, 2018). Even English is a common language without restrictions (Saqlain, 2020) and some countries use English as an official language as well as a second language (Ghamdi, 2020). Ahmadi (2018) argues that around two or three billion people in the world use English to communicate for academic purposes, tourism, entertainment, business and finance, information, politics, economics, and interpersonal relationships. With the emergence of the important role of English in which several countries have developed strategies that support the improvement of English as a language of instruction, a lingua franca in all aspects of human life (Harman et al., 2010; Jenkins, 2006); and is currently an unrivaled language as a major international academic language (Cantwell & Johnson, 2017). In Indonesia, English has become an important subject to teach in schools (Jayanti & Norahmi, 2015).

Therefore, the educational policy for the introduction of English from elementary school has been determined (Johnstone, 2009) because of the belief that learning a language from an early age is good (Ahmadi, 2018; Hu, 2007a; Nunan, 2003). Besides, proficiency in English, especially for the world of work is highly recommended (Cantwell & Johnson, 2017; Hu, 2007a), and teaching English to students aged 3–13 years has become a global phenomenon due to economic globalization and neoliberal education (Sulistiyo et al., 2020). Accordingly, many parents nowadays want schools to provide English language learning for their children (Hawanti, 2014; Lestariyana & Widodo, 2018; Zein, 2009, 2017). This parental demand is driven by a great concern among parents who have a positive attitude towards their children learning English at an early age and imagine their children getting a better education and a brighter future (Hawanti, 2014; Lestariyana & Widodo, 2018; Widodo, 2016; Zein et al., 2020).

Students in Asian countries take English as the main subject from the first year of primary school since it is formally required in the curriculum, and many Asian countries place an emphasis on developing students' English skills (Lestariyana & Widodo, 2018; Sulistiyo et al., 2020; Widodo, 2016; Zhang, 2021). English learning is also associated with economic, social, and political considerations (Hu, 2007b; Zein et al., 2020). In Indonesia, the implementation of English as a subject is still a matter of debate regarding its status as a local subject (Hawanti, 2014; Zein et al., 2020), and many private and public schools include English as a local content subject in the curriculum (Lestariyana & Widodo, 2018; Widodo, 2016). Professional and learning resources must be prepared (Zein, 2012; Sulistiyo et al., 2020) and mastery of English for teacher competence is considered an important indicator of competitiveness in international universities (Zhang, 2002). Currently, there are many emerging teachers teaching English for early childhood students (TEYL) and many publications in this field in the last five years (Lestariyana & Widodo, 2018; Widodo, 2016; Yim, 2016) and many concerns about the practice of language curriculum in primary schools (Chao et al., 2014; Hu, 2007b).

In Indonesia, several publications have discussed the concerns and problems of English teachers in elementary schools with this language curriculum (Hawanti, 2014; Zein, 2009, 2017). A number of similar studies as quoted by (Iskandar, 2015) show that the most challenging implementation of teaching English in elementary schools is how to understand the concept of teaching English as a local school subject. As a result, most teachers are less able to design English teaching materials that are suitable for students' learning levels. Another consequence is that young learners are not interested in learning English. However, there are no previous studies that discuss the teacher's perspective on teaching EFL to elementary school students. That is why this study tries to investigate how the teaching and learning process of English is carried out in elementary schools. This study is set to answer the question: How teaching and learning processes of English are carried out in elementary schools?

## METHOD

This study was set to explore the processes of English as local content in primary schools in Sleman. This study was of great value since it would develop an understanding of how primary school teachers perceive English as one of the local content to equip the students with English skills. This research used the qualitative method. The data gathering was done through semi-structured interviews as suggested by Renandya & Farrell (2011). For data analysis, this research used an open-coding qualitative approach to interpret and analyze the teachers' reflections on the teaching experiences. The data resources were taken from the two primary English teachers who have been teaching for more than two years. Those teachers agreed to be interviewed through an online application due to the pandemic Covid -19 where it was impossible to conduct face-to-face interviews.

The participants were selected using purposive sampling to meet the aim of qualitative sampling which is to observe the individuals who can avail rich and various insights into the phenomenon under the observation to optimize what we can learn (Dörnyei, 2007). Both participants were professional teachers who have been teaching English to students in primary school for more than 3 years. They are in their thirties. They have participated in innovative teacher training programs to create learning models, and took part in English teacher professional and pedagogic development programs. Above all, they have a strong belief that English as a foreign language (EFL) is very important to prepare students for higher education. For these reasons, the participants have their perceptions toward English teaching drawn from the deep

discernment of their choices regarding the use of English instruction and take responsibility for the perspective they addressed.

The personal data of the participants are as follows :

Table 1. a summary of English teacher's demographics

Participant area	Gender	Qualification	Teaching experience
SD Kanisius Duwet	Male	S1 from English education	3 years
SD Kanisius Minggir	Female	S1 form English education	9 years

In the discussion, the data was presented in the narrative version, as (Ishtiaq, 2019) suggests the researcher's comments in the qualitative method must end with the analyzed narrative data. Besides, to gain deeper interviews, the teachers' conceptual understanding of themselves should emerge in the way they provide the answers during the interviews (Kelchtermans, 2013).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The results of this study consisted of an interview sheet that presented the results of the study. The following are the results of the teachers' responses from interviews that researchers have conducted.

Table 2. Results of the teacher's responses

Question	Participant	Response
Do you agree with the use of English in English class?	A	Yes, I agree (with the use of English in class). By using English in class as a means of language instructions, the target language being learned will be more effectively understood by the learners since what the teacher emphasizes is the language function rather than the concept of language use. Besides, using English as the means of communication in teaching encourages the learners to get engaged in learning English because they think that learning English is interesting."
	B	Luckily, I teach in a big class (small classes and big classes have different methods), where Indonesia is the dominant language for them....to make sure that they understand the lesson I switch the English to Indonesia

Do you believe that using English as the language of instruction in class can increase students' interest and enthusiasm?	A	Yes, I believe that to stimulate the students' enthusiasm for learning English, I need to create a strong foundation in the basic English pattern. Applying English as the teaching instructions in class stipulates learning more effectively and intensively. English as an elective subject, on the other hand, will support the teacher to be creative and interactive in creating the teaching and learning dynamics in the class. Besides, English as an elective subject has a different characteristic compared with the other primary school subjects that will be used to determine the students' promotion to the next level of the class."
	B	yes exactly, as an English teacher, I must utilize EFL more than the Indonesian language, maybe 70% as to be compared to 30% of the total teaching allocation during an English class...I use the Indonesian language just to confirm if my lesson is understandable..when I speak English, my students feel interested and they want to like her..(they want to be able to speak English too)
Do you believe that using English during teaching helps me to achieve learning goals	A	Yes, as a graduate of an English Department, I know how important it is to learn English for the learner's future education. I believe that as a medium of language teaching, English can be learned effectively by the learners, and I think that using English during the teaching helps me to achieve learning goal which focuses on the students' language skills which are more practical rather than conceptual
	B	I agree with the use of EF, but accompanied by the right methods...so make sure that I don't speak English for myself, yet the learners also understand what I said (in English)
whether they use textbooks as a learning resource, students find	A	I can develop my teaching skill from the textbooks I read. From the writers of the textbooks, I learn how to



it helpful to understand English instruction		develop the learning materials that will help the students learn English more actively. Moreover, with the textbooks while learning English, the learners feel assisted to understand the English instructions given by the teachers. Another benefit of using textbooks is that the learners can save time and focus on the teachers' instructions since they do not need to take notes every time the teacher explains. The learners can also use the textbooks for individual learning at home
	B	I was about to say that textbooks help me facilitate the topic of the learning, and then I usually enrich the materials by combining them with other similar materials downloaded from the internet or taken from other textbooks.”
Does the use of English instruction when teaching help me in teaching English?	A	For the first year, the vocabularies to be taught are about fruits, and in the second and the third year are about daily activities. All of the vocabulary will be the materials for listening, speaking, reading, and writing. I must speak slowly and clearly when pronouncing the vocabulary since they are still young learners and for most of them English is quite new. For the first and the second, the writing skill and reading are very simple, they just imitate the words or sentences written in the textbooks. For listening, I usually ask them to pay attention to the way I pronounce the words and sentences. For the students in the third year, writing skills can be developed by asking them to write a simple sentence related to their daily activities
	B	I am not sure whether what I have explained using code-switching is well understood.” I teach in both English and Indonesia to make sure that they understand the lesson I teach

### Discussion

The following is the summary of the findings of the study. To start with, the description of the teacher's perceptions toward teaching English in primary school begins the discussion to

portray the teacher's belief. The data collection was taken by conducting an online platform due to the pandemic disease. The data were taken by providing online formatted questions in Indonesian language and translated into English. Further data gathering were conducted by having online conversation utilizing an online platform. The two participants represent two different perspectives and beliefs toward teaching English to young learners which are students 1, 2, and 3 years-old schoolings.

### Case one: Participant A

Participant A believes that English should be dominant <sup>4</sup> in the teaching and learning process, focusing on the language functions. The utilization of English as a means of introducing English skills is believed to enable the teacher to provide functional language rather than conceptual, since the students are considered young learners who like to learn a language by observing, imitating, watching, and listening (Orosz, 2007). Meanwhile, the teacher's belief as Macaro's perspective represents the maximal position that to teach English means to exclusively expose the students to the target language. As participant one said :

*"....Yes, I agree (with the use of English in class). By using English in class as a means of language instructions, the target language being learned will be more effectively understood by the learners since what the teacher emphasizes is the language function rather than the concept of language use. Besides, using English as the means of communication in teaching encourages the learners to get engaged in learning English because they think that learning English is interesting."*

Another perspective of participant A is regarding the conducive learning situation. It was said that utilizing English as language instruction in class promotes the interest and enthusiasm of the learners since it leads to bear harmony and balance in the learning environment (Senior, 2006). It relates to Macaros' (2005) perspective of the optimal level at which the teacher's belief is demonstrated. the most important of all when learning English is the warm and respectful rapport between the teacher and the learners in the class. Besides, as an elective subject that is not considered the local content, English will not become the requirement for the students to get promoted to the next class (Wijaya, 2015) Meaning to say that the status of English as an elective will give more chances for students to learn it more attentively.

*"yes, I believe that to stimulate the students' enthusiasm in learning English, I need to create a strong foundation as the basic English pattern. Applying English as the teaching instructions in class stipulates learning more effectively and intensively. English as an elective subject, on the other hand, will support the teacher to be creative and interactive in creating the teaching and learning dynamics in the class since English is merely an academic matter but it is a skill of using the language. Besides, English is not a school subject that will determine the students' promotion to the next level of the class."*

Regarding the teacher's belief, participant A said that what he has been doing by using English as the means of communication in teaching English, the teacher feels that it improves his self-confidence to keep motivated in assisting the students to get more interested and active in the class. In addition, the teacher feels that English used as a medium to communicate in teaching promotes the teacher's belief to attain the target of learning. At this point, the teacher's belief gives a positive impact on his persistence to keep thriving in how English should be thought, and how the learning goal should be attained (Popham and Baker, 2005). The following is what was said by participant one.

*“ Yes, as a graduate from an English Department, I know how important it is to learn English for the learners' future education. I believe that as a medium of language teaching, English can be learned effectively by the learners, and I think that using English during teaching helps me achieve learning goal which focuses on the students' language skills which are more practical rather than conceptual.”*

Another important element for young learners to learn English is the learning resources. One of the learning resources that is commonly used is the English textbooks for primary school students. For the teachers, such belief regarding the availability of written English resources empowers the teacher to develop and plan the teaching-learning in class (Rahmawati, 2018). Besides, the use of textbooks for learning English helps him when he speaks English during teaching. Since participant one perceives that the use of English when teaching attracts the students' attention and it makes it easier to teach English with the textbooks in the students' hands. As he argued :

*“I can develop my teaching skill from the textbooks I read. From the writers of the textbooks, I learn how to develop the learning materials that will help the students learn English more actively. Moreover, with the textbooks while learning English, the learners feel assisted to understand the English instructions given by the teachers. Another benefit of using textbooks is that the learners can save time and focus on the teacher's instructions since they do not need to take notes every time the teacher explains. The learners can also use the textbooks for individual learning at home.”*

For participant A, the use of English instructions when teaching helps him to develop all skills of English namely listening, speaking, writing and reading. When teaching vocabulary, for example, a teacher must select the vocabulary containing the concrete nouns, and action verbs that are very simple or less complicated. He must also give examples of how to pronounce those words and keep instructing the learners in English too. More specifically, the vocabulary the students learn must be about things or actions the learners encounter every day since the teacher believes that the abstract nouns and verbs will be complicated to understand and yet make the learners less interested in learning English (Dale, 1971) as he said.

*“ For the first-year students, the vocabularies to be taught are about fruits, the second and the third year are about daily activities. All of the vocabulary will be the materials for listening, speaking, reading, and writing. I must speak slowly and clearly when pronouncing the vocabulary since they are still young learners and for most of them English is quite new. For the first and the second, the writing skill and reading are very simple, they just imitate the words or sentences written in the textbooks. For listening, I usually ask them to pay attention to the way I pronounce the words and sentences. For the students of the third year, writing skills can be developed by asking them to write a simple sentence related to their daily activities”.*

### **Case two: Participant B**

Participant B's perspective according to (Macaro, 2001, 2005) is in the level of optimal position, that is using bilingual language since the participant (female teacher) believes that the use of ELF as a medium of class instruction is not a must. She argues that English is quite new for young learners and they have never learned English before and their mother tongue is the Indonesian language for their daily communication. She speaks English whenever necessary because the teacher is the one who is in charge of selecting the language instruction to be applied in the teaching-learning. Further, she explains that the selection of language instruction is



mostlly influenced by the dynamics of the class. It is best negotiated and synchronized with the context of the learners' culture and personal relationships (Cook, 2001; Levine, 2014) She argued:

*"Luckily, I teach in a big class ( small class and big class have different methods), where Indonesia is the dominant language for them....to make sure that they understand the lesson I switch the English into Indonesia."*

Participant B stated that the utilization of English as a means of instruction would make the learners more enthusiastic about learning English. Moreover, she believes that applying code-switching would be of value for the learners to ensure that the learners understand what the teacher explains. Without their mother tongue instruction, she is not certain if the learning goal can be achieved effectively, or in worse the learning goal is never achieved." (Surayatika, 2020). She stated:

*"I am not sure whether what I have explained using code-switching is well understood." I teach in both English and Indonesia to make sure that they understand the lesson I teach".*

As She explained, teaching English utilizing EFL promotes her to be more confident and therefore promised to improve her teaching quality to be more interesting for the young learners. However, she realizes the use of EFL as a medium of language instruction in class should not be exposed all the time during the teaching (Culligan & Turnbull, 2012) and the use of EFL should also be accompanied by the use of Indonesia as well. As she said:

*"yes exactly, as an English teacher, I must utilize EFL more than Indonesia, ...maybe 70% as to be compared to 30% of the total teaching allocation during an English class...I use the Indonesian language just to confirm if my lesson is understandable..when I speak English, my students feel interested and they want to like her..(they want to be able to speak English too)".*

She acknowledged that the use of EFL helps her to attain the learners' learning goals. Therefore she personalized her teaching methods as playing an important role to achieve the learning goal. Not necessarily important, the use of appropriate teaching strategies that is the use of the Indonesian language positively, would help the learners learn English mastery (Lee & Macaro, 2013). As she pointed out:

*"I agree with the use of EF, but accompanied by the right methods...so make sure that I don't speak English for myself, yet the learners also understand what I said (in English)"*

Similar to the first participant, the use of English textbooks helps the teacher design the indicators for her teaching plans. As she argued:

*" I was about to say that textbooks help me facilitate the topic of the learning, and then I usually enrich the materials by combining them with other similar materials downloaded from the internet or taken from other textbooks."*

Participant B personalized her belief that she needs to explore her own materials to cover all the English skills, that are listening, reading, speaking, and writing as written in Depdikbud (Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan) .she argued that it is advisable that teaching English for young learners must be equipped with a particular requirement. For example, when teaching vocabulary, the words the teacher selects should be simple and communicative (easily

understood by the learners) and should not be focusing on complex sentences with complicated English structures. The selected words should be relevant to the learners' world of life. Further, she said, learning a language regarding both the conceptual and abstract vocabularies will lessen the learner's motivation and interest (Dale, 1971) She explained:

*"yes I teach those four skills including grammar, and for the materials, I chose those related to daily activities. I teach vocabularies related to the nouns that exist around the student's personal life."*

## CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that primary school English teachers utilize EFL in their teaching for different reasons. Both of them believe that the use of EFL will help young learners improve their interest in learning English. However, regarding the teachers' perspectives and beliefs, the two teachers share differently. One teacher believes that the exclusivity of the target language should be exposed to the young learners since it is the best time for the young learners to observe, imitate, watch, do an activity, and listen to English as their new language. On the other side, the use of EFL must be applied wisely, that is to say, that teaching English in formal primary education, especially for young learners need to give more attention to the broader context of the young learners, including how to build a conducive rapport between the teacher and the learners. For that reason, the teacher believes to use bilingual when teaching English, since she needs to ensure that the learners are certain and understanding of what they are learning, to create a good rapport with the students, the teacher must be able to lessen the pressure of being confused in learning English.

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