

# English Teachers' Dilemma of English Subject in Elementary School Level

*Riski Mardhatilah<sup>a</sup>, Robby Anggriawan<sup>b</sup>, Nanda Parentsa Hopi<sup>c</sup>*

<sup>a</sup>Islamic Public Elementary School (MIN 3) Pekanbaru, Teuku Bey St, Pekanbaru 28284, Indonesia

<sup>b</sup>Illinois State University, 100 N University St, Normal, Illinois 61761, USA

<sup>c</sup>Islamic State Sultan Syarif Kasim University, KH. Ahmad Dahlan St, Pekanbaru 28122, Indonesia

## ABSTRACT

Learning English in schools is used to support students' English skills, so that the students are able to communicate in daily conversation, especially in a school context. This phenomenon seems contrary to what is happening in Public Elementary Schools today. Many of the elementary schools are no longer learning English subjects. This creates a dilemma for teachers because students are not literate in English. This happens in Islamic Public Elementary Schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri - MIN) too. Therefore, this study aims to explore (1) the inability of students to understand simple English vocabulary, and conversation in the school environment, (2) the low level of English language skills of students when they want to continue their education to a higher level (SMP), and (3) parents' support and supervision of learning English by getting additional English classes or tutoring. To collect the data in this study, an interview is used as a qualitative research. The data will be taken at MI, which is an Islamic-based elementary school. The participants in this study were the Principals of MI in Pekanbaru. Three teachers are from MI in Pekanbaru, and three students' parents. Finally, there will be changes in the application of English learning evenly in elementary schools, especially public schools. So that the output issued by public schools is also able to compete in the use of English.

*Keywords: English skill, English subject, communicate, Elementary School, dilemma, inability*

## 1. Introduction

The application of teaching English in Indonesia started after the independence of Indonesia. Various kinds of curriculum and methods have been designed and developed to improve students' ability to learn and understand English. However, this is still not felt optimally. Not all students are able to communicate well through the English language. Various factors became the background why this was not achieved as expected.

Crystal (2003) that English is spread out and is used by almost a quarter of the world's population and continues to grow to one and a half trillion in the early 2000s. The second reason is that by mastering English, people will easily enter and be able to access the world of information and technology.

Hence, students should begin from the elementary level, and so on up to college. This is based on the established curriculum.

The curriculum is the guide for all educators on what is important for teaching and learning so that every student has access to a good learning experience. The curriculum is designed by the government as a form of reference and rules for better education, which is dynamic so that the curriculum can be developed, revised, and/or replaced. (Tegamuni & Ugu, 2019). Regarding the importance of the curriculum, it can be concluded that the curriculum needs to be implemented to achieve certain educational goals (Apsari, 2018).

Currently, there are still many schools that use the 2013 curriculum. In this curriculum, English has been abolished in elementary schools. This is very unfortunate if it is referring to the ability of children at a basic level since children can always do more than we think they can, they have huge learning potential, and the foreign language classroom does them a disservice if we do not exploit that potential" (Cameron, 2001).

English is taught at the elementary level, in order to make it easier for students to communicate in advanced schools. In addition, English is an important instrument that must be given to students at a young age, because if

they are accustomed to using it, they will be able to compete when they are no longer in the school environment.

This research was conducted because of teacher complaints about the absence of English lessons at the basic level, not only that, complaints from parents who did not understand the curriculum for the absence of English language learning at the elementary level.

This study aims to determine the perception of the elimination of English lessons from the elementary level. To achieve that, it is constructed several questions in this study, the research questions are:

- What are parents, elementary teachers, and school principals' perspectives about English subjects in Elementary school?
- What are parents, elementary teachers, and school principals' supports in learning English for their children in elementary school?

## 2. Method

The research design of this research was qualitative research. "Qualitative research involved data collection procedures that result primarily in open-ended, non-numerical data which is analyzed primarily by non-statistical methods" –Dorney (2007).

### 2.1 Research design

In this study, the researcher uses a semi-structured-interview to collect the data. involved prepared questioning guided by identified themes in a consistent and systematic manner.(Moustakas, 1994). By using this research design, the researcher can communicate directly with the participant.

### 2.2 Participants

The researcher used purposive sampling in order to choose the participant. The participants of this research were elementary school principals (3 participants), parents or guidance (3 participants), and elementary teachers (3 participants). The total of participants is 9 participants.

Table 1. Participants' Demographics

Participants	Gender	Principal / Teacher / Parents, Guidance
Participant 1		Principal 1 (P1)
Participant 2		Principal 2 (P2)
Participant 3		Principal 3 (P3)
Participant 4		Teacher 1 (T1)
Participant 5		Teacher 2 (T2)
Participant 6		Teacher 3 (T3)

Participant 7	Parents Guidance 1 (PG1)
Participant 8	Parents Guidance 2 (PG2)
Participant 9	Parents Guidance 3 (PG3)

### 2.3 Data Collection Method

In this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews in collecting the data. In this study, the writers used semi-structured data to get some information that helps to get comprehensive data by asking questions related to the topic.

According to Burn quoted in (Suryani et al., 2020), interviews and discussions are face-to-face personal interactions, which generate data on research problems and allow specific discussion from others perspective. Interviews were used to get a lot of information about teaching difficulties English in elementary schools is related to the 2013 Curriculum.

The writers used this interview method because the researcher wanted to get more detailed data which is impossible to obtain. The writer used this method to measure the participants' perceptions about the dilemma of removing English Subjects at the Elementary School Level and also to ask the participant to give some suggestions and criticism about English subjects at the elementary school level. The questions in the semi-structured interview are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Interview Questions

Participants	Interview Questions
Principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think about the implementation of the curriculum that has an impact on the absence of English at the basic level?</li> <li>• In your opinion, is English needed to be learned in elementary school? Which level/grade/age will be best taught in school?</li> <li>• Do you have any comments or suggestions about English implementation at the elementary school?</li> </ul>
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your opinion, is English needed to be learned in elementary school?</li> <li>• Are there any comments from students regarding the absence of learning English at school?</li> <li>• Do you have any comments or suggestions about English implementation at the elementary school?</li> </ul>
Parent, Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your opinion, is English needed to be learned in elementary school?</li> <li>• What do you think about the response of students to things related to English while English is not taught in schools?</li> <li>• Do you have any comments or suggestions about English implementation at the elementary school?</li> </ul>

## 2.4 Data Collection Tools

Data analysis started as soon as the course of data collection began. It was a process of seeking and arranging the data gathered from field notes, interviews, and documentation.

Data analysis was conducted after the data had been collected. This data was collected by recording and the results of the recording were analyzed by the researcher. This re-research conducted by using semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions about their perspectives on teaching and learning in rural areas, the challenges, and some possible suggestions were used to collect data for this study. The interviews were recorded using a mobile phone recorder application. The transcriptions were sent to all participants for validation and to ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the data (Utami & Prestridge, 2018).

## 3. Finding

The findings are connected to the theories supporting the exploration of the issues formulated in each of the research questions. They are used as justifications of the qualitative dispositions to support the data analysis and research conclusion.

### 3.1 *The parents, elementary teachers, and school principals' perspectives on English subjects in Elementary school*

Based on the investigation, there were some points of view about English subjects in Elementary school. The principals stated as the leaders in the school, principals have crucial roles in the decision-making process for curriculum in elementary schools. Besides, teachers and parents agreed that English needs to be learned at the elementary level. By implementing English students will be able to compete and understand the daily conversation. Further implementation is that by teaching English as early as it is possible in the education system, it helps students to study languages too, as it mentioned by many scholars which claim that it is beneficial teaching and learning for young learners (Rixon, 2013; Munoz, 2006, and Goorhuis-Brouwer & de Bot, 2010)

Regarding the teachers' perspectives, English lessons should be started at the basic level because children at the elementary level are able to follow what the teacher exemplifies. English lessons should exist as an additional lesson, if it is possible, English lessons become mandatory lessons, so that the students will be able to understand English conversations, especially in the school

environment. English teachers also emphasized the dilemma which they were faced in the school and implementing curriculum or English subjects in their teaching practices in the classroom. It is because most teachers in elementary school have graduated in Elementary School Teaching and Learning Faculty (FKIP-PGSD) where their content areas are teaching in general or thematics in elementary class. There are possibilities too where elementary teachers have graduated from English department major or English Teaching and Learning (FKIP Bahasa Inggris) which made them able to teach English as content areas as their degree holds, or even other majors or departments such as Science and Mathematic Faculty (FMIPA), Civic Teaching and Learning Faculty (FKIP Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan) or Indonesian Teaching and Learning Faculty (FKIP Bahasa Indonesia). The different degree which elementary teachers have existed as the educational background in elementary teachers, and it made them must be ready to teach subject thematically or specifically. Long story short, teaching a subject which is not a teacher's specialization may not result in maximum ways for teachers themselves and students.

The dilemma also comes from the English implementation itself in the school. As previously mentioned the crucial role of principals in elementary schools, to guide their teachers and as one of decision makers in schools, the relation between teachers and principals' relationship professionally is highlighted too. If the principals maintain the elementary schools well, teachers' dilemma in implementing English in elementary schools could be addressed, whether it comes to the decision to teach it as an additional subject (Muatan Local), mandatory subjects, or not to teach it. A clear decision making is needed here which comes from all stakeholders in elementary schools too, from principal, teacher, parents and guidance, school committee, and students.

Alongside principals and English teachers, parents' perspectives to English implementation are necessary and needed at school, because English is commonplace today. Students should begin to be introduced to English lessons in elementary school, in terms of competence. If the school does not teach English language learning, students will be left behind and they believe that students will be less competitive in the global era, since mastering English or foreign language is considered as one of the needed skills.

### 3.2 *The parents, elementary teachers, and school principals' support in learning English for their children in elementary school*

Regarding the answer of the questions, there are various supports in learning English. One of the principal talked, English Classes still exist in the school. Besides, for the teacher and the parents, Students should take additional lessons outside of school so that they are not far behind from other students.

## 4. Result and Discussion

### 4.1 *The parents, elementary teachers, and school principals' perspectives on English subjects in Elementary school*

Based on the result of the interview The teacher's perspective of English lessons at the basic level is that English is very important. Many of the learning books use two languages, Indonesian and English. Therefore, students at the elementary level should start learning English. The application of English in schools is varied, some schools apply and some do not, but the most important thing is, English lessons are very important to learn. This is important because if students learn English, they will start with daily conversations, understanding the vocabulary around the school. and this will also be very helpful for students when continuing to higher school or junior high school. The teacher said :

*"If the English lesson is abolished. then this will have a bad impact for the students, because at this time students should start getting to know about English. English is very important, everything now is all in English. For example, the handbook uses two languages. Even the announcements at school are in English. so it's a loss if English in class is eliminated. students will feel confused about what they hear. and at this age this is a good time for students to remember and imitate."* Teacher 2 (T2)

From the results of the interview above, it can be concluded that it is very unfortunate if there is no English language learning at school. Children will have a bad impact, which is difficult to understand.

Other teacher said :

*"Just imagine if our students are not taught English, then they will be left behind, unable to have daily conversation*

*in the school environment, and not understand the names of objects around the school. and of course students are worried that they will have difficulty in learning English at the secondary level. Surely the English lesson is much more difficult."* Teacher 3 (T3)

Furthermore the parent said :

*"English should be in elementary school. For example, my child likes to play games, in the game all use English, so my child can learn English from games only. it feels unbalanced, if the school is not held, so that children can start daily conversations in English, that would be great"* Parents Guidance 2 (PG2)

Interestingly, one of the school is implmented the English lesson in the class, the principal said:

*"For the application of English lessons, our school continues to apply English lessons. Because in my view, it is no longer mandatory in the curriculum. but the school also has the authority to implement English classes. but not for compulsory lessons."* Principal 2 (P2)

### 4.2 *The parents, elementary teachers, and school principals' support in learning English for their children in elementary school*

Based on the result of the interview to support learning for students, all parties must take part. Especially school principals, teachers, and parents. For the application of English in elementary schools, due to curriculum development in the 2013 curriculum by removing English lessons at the elementary level, it is necessary to have suggestions, input and support.

The researchers found the same perception of the principal and the teacher. Although in the classroom, students do not learn English, students must be familiarized with the English language daily. For example, at school, morning habituation is applied in English. Using the announcement of the change of lessons in English, every corner of the literacy is also spiked with English.

The principal said:

*"To support students' English, of course the school is ready with solutions so that the students are familiar with*

*English. For example the application of morning habituation in English, there are announcements in the form of English as well as the school literacy corner".*  
Principal 1 (P1)

The parent said :

*"My son at home has started to know English from his cellphone, by playing games and watching YouTube. Therefore, to straighten his understanding, there should be English at school, so that students understand more about english".* Parents Guidance 1 (PG1)

Getting used to English in students is quite challenging, because this starts from the habits of the students. parents explain that students at home are getting used to English, for example using games on cell phones, then watching YouTube channels. Therefore, learning English at school is very necessary, so that children not only understand what is being said in the game but are also able to use conversations in English.

In addition other parent said:

*"As a parent, I will certainly provide full support for the progress of my child's education, provide additional facilities and order children to take additional English classes".* (Parents Guidance 2 (PG2)

In supporting the development of the English language of students, parents are willing to provide additional facilities to students by having a private English course.

## 5. Conclusion

From the data obtained and discussed in the previous section, This study has three main conclusions. First, the implementation of the elimination of English lessons at the basic level is considered inappropriate. because it will have a negative impact for the students, many of the students do not know the basics of English at the elementary level. Secondly, the students are unable to communicate in daily conversations using English. This poses a deep dilemma for English teachers. Students are still connected to English, so schools should provide some solutions, for example by having certain areas that present an English corner, and introducing English vocabulary to habituation before entering their classes. and thirdly, the solution offered by parents is in the presence of additional English classes

## Acknowledgments

The authors of this research thanks to the principals, teachers, and parents so that the authors can complete and publish this journal.

## References

- Apsari, Y. (2018). Teachers' Problems And Solutions In Implementing Curriculum 2013. *Acuity: Journal Of English Language Pedagogy, Literature And Culture*, 3(1), 11-23.
- Cameron, Lyne. (2001). *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal. (2003). *English As A Global Language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dornyei, Z. (2007). *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Goorhuis-Brouwer, S., & de Bot, K. (2010). Impact of early English language teaching on L1 and L2 development in children in Dutch schools. *International Journal of bilingualism*, 14(3), 289-302.
- Gunawan, S., & Saputra, H. (2020). Problems and Teaching Solutions for Students' in Learning English. *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)*, 3(1), 59. <https://doi.org/10.22460/project.v3i1.p59-64>.
- Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. California: Sage Publications.
- Muñoz, C. (Ed.). (2006). *Age and the rate of foreign language learning* (Vol. 19). *Multilingual Matters*.
- Rixon, S. (2013). *British Council survey of policy and practice in primary English language teaching worldwide*.
- Tegamuni, S., & Ugu, K. (2019). The Teacher's Problems in Implementing Curriculum 2013 at State Senior High School 3 of West Halmahera. *Langua: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Education*, 2(1), 33-38. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2588114>
- Utami, I. G. A. L. P., & Prestridge, S. (2018). How English teachers learn in Indonesia: Tension between policy-driven and self-driven professional development. *TEFLIN Journal*, 2