

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on English teaching and learning conducted at the elementary school level and highlights the pedagogical practices of English language teaching to young learners. This introductory chapter presents seven sub-chapters that include the background of the study, the research questions, the purposes, the scope, the significances, and clarifies the terms used throughout the study by synthesizing the theories related to the topic. An overview of the paper organization is presented at the end of this chapter as a guide to read and understand the dissertation.

1.1. Background of the Study

The reputation of English as a global language (Graddol, 2006, p. 58), an international language (Rubdy and Saraceni, 2006, p. 8), as well as a lingua franca (Hulmbauer, Bohringer, and Seidlhofer, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2014), has been a catalyst for the immense upsurge of concern in English language teaching and learning across the world. Indonesia is no exception. As the first foreign language taught at Indonesian school (Lauder, 2008), English as a subject has been compulsorily taught to secondary school students since 1945 onwards, while the higher-grade students (grade 4 - 6) of elementary school started to study English as an elective subject since the 1990s (Alwasilah, 2013).

Presently, English teaching starts earlier due to the high demand from society (Eurydice, 2017; Garton & Copland, 2019; Tseng, 2014). Learning English at an earlier age is believed to represent better education, which leads to a brighter future. Jin and Cortazzi (2019) support the belief by pointing out that parents worldwide perceive that early English learning can be an investment that accommodates children's entry into good secondary schools and thence into good universities. In the same vein, several publications on early English teaching in the Indonesian context (Cameron, 2003; Hawanti, 2014; Lestariyana and Widodo, 2018; Widodo, 2016; Zein, 2009, 2017b) also confirm that parents' demand for early English teaching has fortified elementary schools to offer English as a subject.

In the middle of its massive development, English teaching in Indonesian primary schooling experienced a drastic shift in 2012 when the Ministry of Education and Culture (henceforth—MoEC) which was previously known as Ministry of Nasional Education (henceforth—MoNE) before 2011, decided to replace the national curriculum. After experiencing eight-time changes from 1945 to 2012, the Indonesian curriculum currently applies the newly proposed one, which is called Curriculum 2013. Echoing Zein (2017b), this new curriculum was formulated in the spirit of the 2003 Education Act, which requires education to be conducted democratically, equally and non-discriminatorily based on human rights, religious values, cultural values and national pluralism (pp. 54-55). Thereupon, not only does the reform affect nationwide teaching and learning syllabuses and practices, but it also leads to a severe change in the primary English curriculum.

Alwasilah (2012) and Zein (2017b) highlight that the replacement of the School-Based Curriculum (*Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan/KTSP*) with Curriculum 2013 suggested English education at the elementary school level be seconded to give curricular space for homegrown languages. The idea of developing young generations' fluency and literacy in appropriate local and regional languages as well as nurturing their identity and self-worth has become the catalyst for the removal of English from the group of the local content subject in the elementary school curriculum (Hadisantoso, 2010; Johnstone, 2019; Meisani & Musthafa, 2019; Purnama, 2014; Sepyanda, 2017; Zein, 2017b, 2017c). In the broader context of English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching, the Indonesian Government's aspiration to preserve the indigenous languages is well-supported by Kirkpatrick's (2014) English as a lingua franca (ELF) in ASEAN countries. To this respect, he argues that it is not necessary to teach the language to children, but to young adults—students entering secondary school, who understand how to use English as a lingua franca in today's world. In the meantime, it gives opportunities for children to learn and enhance their local languages and wisdom.

Compared to the previous curriculum, where English was explicitly listed as a local content subject based on the Regulation of MoNE Number 22 the Year 2006 about the Structure of National Curriculum and Number 23 the Year 2006 about the

Graduate Competency Standard, the 2013 Curriculum does not clearly state the position of English in the primary education curriculum. Based on the Regulation of MoEC Number 57 the Year 2014 about the 2013 Curriculum for Elementary Education, elementary school students study six main subjects, namely Religion, Civic Education, Indonesian Language, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. They also study Arts and Physical Education as the compulsory local content subjects, besides the local language spoken in their region (Maryono, 2016; Supeni, 2017). In addition to the main and local content subjects, the school can offer two kinds of extracurricular activities: the required extracurricular subject, which is scout (Prianto, 2016; Sugiono et al., 2018), and the elective extracurricular subject which is given based on the students' talents and interests. Referring to the abovementioned regulations, if elementary schools decide to teach English, they can offer the subject as an elective extracurricular. The exclusion of English from the local content subject group has weakened its position in the current elementary school curriculum. Besides inviting pros and cons, this newly proposed foreign language policy calls various interpretations (Purnama, 2014; Sepyanda, 2017). It also brings other consequences, particularly to teachers, students, schools, and parents, as the most pivotal stakeholders on which the unsettling effect of this austerity policy ensued. Despite the responses and challenges, teaching English for young learners (TEYL) in Indonesia is still prevalently conducted throughout the country (Meisani & Musthafa, 2019; Sulistyono et al., 2019; Zein, 2017b).

It has been widely suggested in the literature that the shortage of qualified teachers has remained the most persuasive reason for recurring problems as indicated in the foreign language policy in Indonesia (Hamied; 2012, 2013; Musthafa, 2010; Musthafa et al., 2018; Sikki et al., 2013; Sukyadi, 2015; Zein, 2016b, 2017a). The quality-related problems that the English teaching force has faced include mismatched academic background, lack of educational qualifications, and inadequate English proficiency. These challenges are assuredly interrelated to the problems that occur at the primary level (Musthafa, 2010; Musthafa & Hamied, 2014; Zein, 2015, 2016a, 2016b). To this point, the Indonesian Government's concern on the English teachers in number and qualification has encouraged the

bottom-up policy to be implemented for English instructions at the primary level. Schools may initiate to conduct English teaching by considering the factors, such as the school's readiness to provide the teachers, the teaching resources, as well as the demands of English learning from the society (Alwasilah, 2013).

Referring to the bottom-up policy applied in Indonesian elementary schools, the impediments in TEYL do not merely deal with the English teachers' quality. The nonappearance of both local and central governmental involvement, specifically in providing the guideline as to the route for teaching, indispensably contributes to how TEYL is conducted. Echoing Handoyo's (2016), as the official English language curriculum at the primary level is not provided, the assigned teachers usually prepare English curriculum documents, like syllabus, textbooks, and workbooks, and test papers by themselves. Instead of developing the teaching materials, many of them depend on the available published textbooks and workbooks and rely upon the existing materials used in the previous curriculum era. In fact, not only does the material development influence the teaching process, but the other vital teaching supports, such as the English subject curriculum, syllabus design, lesson planning, and program evaluation also bring impact on how teachers draw relevant approaches and methods in teaching the language dimension (Zein, 2017a, 2016c). Hamied (2012, 2013), Rich (2019), and Zein (2017a) add by depicting that teachers' quality that is reflected in every classroom activity that they make use of is related to their education.

According to Rich (2019), teachers' education (TED) involves both pre-service teacher education and the professional development opportunities the teachers undertake as in-service teachers. In a similar vein, experts (Garton and Copland, 2019; Musthafa and Hamied, 2014) emphasize that teachers are believed to be the key to the implementation of TEYL policies. The two elements attached to them, their prior education, and any advanced professional learning they have participated in, are essential to efficaciously bridging the policy-practice gap (Garton & Copland, 2019). Concerning this, with a two-credit point elective course that Indonesian tertiary education institution offers to those who want to embark on teaching English in the elementary school, it is moot that the course can equip the

graduate with the capability to conduct pertinent English teaching practices to children. Dealing with the in-service English for young learners (EYL) teachers, the absence of programs to develop teaching profession also affects the outcomes; previous research indicates that the quality of teaching has not fulfilled the demand of EYL pedagogy (Butler, 2015; Copland et al., 2014; Emery, 2012; Kang, 2012; Wu, 2012; Zein, 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017a). The findings of English Proficiency Index (EPI), the world's most substantial English proficiency ranking for the global scope published by Education First (EF) (EF Education First, 2020), reveal that Indonesia has consistently been found in the lowest proficiency band. Although English has been given from the primary level in Indonesian schooling, its EPI rank is far behind its neighbour countries, like Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. While Singapore is the first Asian nation to ever place in the top proficiency band, both Malaysia and the Philippines are now among the top 15-ranked countries in the index (Poedjiastutie et al., 2018). Given this reality, finding out the pedagogy, which is relevant for early language learners in the EYL classroom, becomes one of the attentions that this present study investigates.

This present study begins by seeing the broader view of the trends and policies of TEYL in Indonesia. As there is a robust requirement for more empirical research, it then focuses on the regional level so that comprehensive research can feasibly be conducted. The selected municipality represented the setting of the study is the second populous city in one of the Indonesian provinces. With its metro area, this city has a wide selection of schools and acts as an education hub for university students from many regions in Indonesia (Schaik, 2009). Sadtono (2007) and Zein (2017b) lend support by revealing that the movement of elementary English education in Indonesia started in this city in 1985. It pioneered the existence of EYL in Indonesia and triggered the regional and central Government to broaden the context of TEYL by releasing the Decree No. 060/U/1993 that allowed a school to teach English as a local content subject from Grade 4.

The finding of the preliminary interview with the Head of Elementary Education of the Regional Office of Education in the research site confirmed that the local elementary schools offer English subjects. By referring to the provincial

regulation about the structure of the curriculum at the primary level applied in the research site, the Local Government suggested that the subject was given as an elective extracurricular. Nevertheless, the bottom-up policy towards English teaching at this level of schooling gives the space to the schools to initiate their own English teaching policy based on their schools' potentials.

The investigation starts by finding out the current implementation of TEYL in the above-selected municipality to see how elementary schools respond to the existing English language policy. It identifies the empirical data of the schools that offered English as a subject, the place of the subject in the curriculum, and the English teacher profile. It goes further on examining the students' English proficiency levels to diagnose the baseline of young learners' English. The data are vital to stakeholders, like parents who have allocated substantial funds for their children English learning and likely are curious about what arises from the investment (British Council, n.d.; Johnstone, 2019; Kenyon et al., 2011; McKay, 2006; Meisani, 2018). - In this study, the second research question was intended to identify young learners' strengths and weaknesses in English so that the appropriate level of teaching materials can be determined. The data can be used for designing an evidence-based TEYL curriculum in the future, as suggested by Puskas (2016). A mainstay of this research is explored through the third research question that deals with pedagogy. Basing the research on the statement that under appropriate conditions, an early start can be advantageous (Johnson, 2019), a series of steps were undertaken to identify successful TEYL pedagogies. What was going on in English classrooms, how the teachers taught the subject, and what reasons were put forward for why pedagogical practices in particular schools were considered successful were primarily investigated. The actual pedagogical practices and strategies were seen to discover what worked and what did not. School and teacher-related factors were also examined as both were the enabling factors in the effective pedagogies (Westbrook et al., 2013). Through this in-depth analysis, well-constructed recommendations for a continued offering of English for young learners are formed.

1.2. Research Questions

Based on the defined aims of this investigation elaborated above, the research questions are posed as follows:

- 1) What is the profile of English Education in Elementary Schools in the research site?
 - a. What is the profile of the elementary schools that offer English?
 - b. What are the rationales for conducting English teaching?
 - c. How is the English Language Curriculum implemented?
 - d. What is the profile of the English teachers?
- 2) What are the contributing factors to students' English proficiency?
 - a. What is the students' level of English Proficiency?
 - b. What are the factors that influence students' English proficiency levels?
- 3) Which pedagogical practices most effectively support young learners to learn English at school?
 - a. What are the pedagogical practices used by teachers?
 - b. What are the enabling and disabling factors in effective pedagogy?
 - c. How do school and teacher-related factors best support effective pedagogy?

1.3. Scope of the Study

This study explores the implementation of English education conducted at the elementary school level in a selected Indonesian municipality. The participating schools were the ones supervised by the Regional Office of Education in the city in which there were 274 schools in total. Bearing upon the national curriculum reform, which also affected English teaching in the elementary school, the first research question functioned to identify the schools that offered English and the ones that did not. It then covered the profile of the schools that had English in the curriculum, the reasons underpinning the initiatives of teaching the subject within the 2013 Curriculum, and the English teachers.

The second research question explored the students' English proficiency level. This study limited the student participants to the higher-grade students who sat on Grade 4-6) from nine schools that offered an English subject. To represent

the population, these nine schools were chosen from three groups of schools based on their accreditation status—three schools were accredited A, three were B and, three others were C. The English proficiency of young learners was assessed using the Cambridge Young Learners English Test. The reasons why the test was selected among the other kinds of tests to evaluate young learners' English are presented in Chapter 3. Only listening, reading, and writing sections were given, as students' speaking ability was seen in the classroom observation phase. The results of the test were used to select three model schools where effective pedagogical EYL practices were assumed to be conducted.

The third research question focused on the pedagogical practices of English language teaching to young learners in the three selected excellent schools. As two out of the three selected schools offered two kinds of the school program, one of the programs that provided more amount of English was chosen to be the focus.

1.4. Purposes of the Study

The major aim of the study was to investigate the English education in elementary schools in the selected Indonesian municipality. Precisely, the study put forward the effective pedagogical practices of teaching English to young learners. This overarching aim was broken down into three further sub-objectives. First, it identified the English education in the region. It explored the profile of the elementary schools that offered English, the rationales for conducting English teaching, the English language curriculum, and the profile of their English teachers. Second, the baseline of young learners' English proficiency was found out to know the contributing factors to learners' English achievement. It later was used as the first step to capture the effective pedagogical practices that supported young learners to learn English at school. Third, the data from the first and the second research questions were used to select the participants for further investigation. Besides identifying the pedagogical strategies and practices used by teachers, the enabling and disabling factors related to the school and teacher were examined in order to figure out the ones that supported effective TEYL.

1.5. Significance and Gap of the Study

The significance of the present study was particularized in three major points. First, it identified the current practices of teaching English for Young Learners, specifically in the selected Indonesian municipality. Exploring the existing conditions can help understand the material conditions of English teaching practices in the 2013 Curriculum. Second, the study investigated the primary school students' English proficiency levels as one of the measures to see the effectiveness of English teaching practices besides the other abovementioned criteria. This second point led to frame the best practices of teaching English to Young Learners. Thus, the third point described the English language teaching practices used by teachers in the selected best schools and explores the evidence on the effectiveness of pedagogical practices by explaining the teaching and pedagogical practices, as well as any related factors that made effective pedagogies.

It has been a never-ending discussion when debating about the idea of offering English at elementary schools. However, as the reality shows that English is taught at this level of education regardless the policy of English teaching which is currently applied, the findings of this study enrich the existing theories about teaching English as a second/foreign language to young learners, assessing young learners' English proficiency, and the pedagogical practices in young learners' English classes. In practice, the findings of the study set well-constructed recommendations of teaching English as a second/foreign language to young learners as the facts show that no official guidelines are provided, and the bottom-up English language teaching policy has led to varieties and inequalities to EYL implementation. Regardless of its reformed status that affected the position of English as a subject in the elementary school curriculum, the data gained from the field expose a high demand for the implementation of English teaching at this education level. Thus, the results of the study are expected to give valuable contributions to effective English teaching practices for young learners in the future.

1.6. Clarification of Terms

Defining the key terms and concepts that are central to this study is essential as it provides explanations of how they are used in this dissertation. This subsection elaborates on the five key terms that are applied throughout the study.

1) English education

The term English education is related to teaching and learning of English, including both teacher education and the practices (Li et al., 2019; Lopez-Gopar, 2019). Zein (2017b) used this term to describe the elementary school English teaching policy and the practices that covered the classroom size and length of instruction, the role and status of teachers, and pedagogical concerns. English teaching practices can be in the form of formal and non-formal education. This study focuses on English teaching and learning in the formal setting, which is at the elementary school. For this study, the terms were used to cover the English curriculum, the teaching practices, and any English-related activities at school.

2) English proficiency

Renandya, Hamied, and Nurkamto (2018) and Richards (2018) define language proficiency as a person's ability to use language for a variety of communicative purposes, which is assessed by five indicators, namely accuracy, fluency, complexity, appropriacy and capacity. They further state that being proficient in English means having a good command of English, such as being able to understand the language without difficulty, express a range of ideas clearly in speech and writing, and interact with other speakers comfortably. In this current research, the English proficiency of young learners, the participants of the study, is assessed through the Cambridge English Test for Young Learners. The test covers the listening, reading, and writing sections.

3) Pedagogical practices

Westbrook et al. (2013) describe pedagogy as teacher thinking and teacher doing. It covers not only what teachers do in the classroom, but also their ideas, knowledge, and attitudes concerning the students, the teaching and learning

process, and the curriculum as the teaching guidelines. Further, Zein (2019) frames two dimensions of teachers' classroom management, the instructional dimension, and the learner behaviour management dimension, that embody teacher's pedagogical practices as well as ideas. In the present study, the term refers to what teachers do, think, and say in the classroom to manage the class and the underpinning ideas, beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and understanding behind the practices.

4) School profile

The College Board (2019) depicts that the school profile generally portrays the school information, the community, curricular offerings, and grading system. Not only does it provide the summary of accreditation, institutional memberships, and special recognitions and honours, but it also describes the available academic programs, tracks, and any particular curricula that the school carries out. In this study, the school profile relates to both its overall program and English instructions. Thus, it contains information about the school's type, academic reputation and uniqueness, student-socioeconomic status, its physical entities, achievement, as well as the English curriculum, and the English teachers.

5) Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL)

Johnstone (2019), Puskas (2016), and Scott & Ytreberg (1990) define English for Young Learners (EYL) as pre-primary or primary children's learning of English as a second/foreign language. In the context of the present study, TEYL refers to teaching English as a second language to elementary school students whose range of age is between 7 to 12 years old.

1.7. Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The introductory chapter presents the explanation of the background of the study and the related supporting points that describe why this study is carried out and how it contributes to theoretical, practical, and pedagogical aspects in TEYL. It frames the research questions, the significance of the study, and the clarification of the key terms.

The following chapter discusses the relevant literature review that highlights the theories that underpin the pedagogical practices of English for young learners. It also provides the underlying theories of assessing young learners' English. Chapter three centers on the methodology of the study. It gives the elaboration of the research design applied in this research, the participants, the settings, the data collection and instrumentation, the data analysis, and the ethical consent. The next chapter exposes the results of the study. It is presented in three sections based on the research questions. The discussion is followed after all the findings are given. Finally, the conclusion, implication, as well as the limitation of the study and the recommendations for future research are delivered in Chapter five.