

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the study, comprising the background, formulation of the problem, operational definitions, aim of the study, and significance of the study.

A. Background of the Study

Mastering English from an early age is a valuable foundation for children in this era of globalisation. At primary school age (6-12 years), children's brains are in an optimal phase for absorbing new languages, as Lenneberg (1967) explained in his critical period theory. Recent research by Muhabbat (2024) reinforces this finding by showing that children exposed to a foreign language from a young age have a better ability to remember and use new vocabulary. The advantages of learning English in primary school are not limited to cognitive aspects. In practice, acquiring this international language leads to the development of fluent communication skills, enhances self-confidence, and gains access to global knowledge. With a strong foundation in English from an early age, Indonesian children will be better prepared to compete on the global stage when they grow up.

Despite these cognitive and practical benefits, the implementation of English teaching in Indonesian primary schools faces systemic challenges. In the regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, number 12 of 2024 concerning Curriculum in Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, and Secondary Education, states that English language subjects in primary schools become optional subjects that can be held based on the readiness of the education unit until the 2026/2027 school year and switch to compulsory subjects in the 2027/2028 school year. However, current implementations vary widely, with English often taught as a local content subject without a standardised methodology (Wahyuningsih et al., 2023). This flexibility has resulted in diverse classroom practices, some of which may not fully align with established TEYL principles. Challenges such as limited resources (Herayana & Suryaningsih, 2025) and insufficient teacher training in child-centred

methodologies (Kurniawati & Atmojo, 2025) further complicate the effective implementation of TEYL.

While existing studies have mapped these structural challenges, little attention has been paid to how English language teaching takes place in primary schools. This study aims to investigate the degree to which English language teaching practices in Indonesian primary schools align with the principles of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL). By analysing the teaching methods used by the teacher, including communicative approaches, contextualisation of materials, use of multisensory media, and child development-based assessment techniques, this study will identify gaps between theory and actual implementation. The research findings are expected to provide concrete recommendations for aligning the curriculum and teacher training with TEYL standards, particularly in anticipation of the mandatory English language policy in 2027/2028. This analysis not only evaluates pedagogical suitability but also offers practical solutions that are adaptive to the diversity of educational contexts in Indonesia.

B. Formulation of the Problem

The research question is formulated: How does an English teacher teach English in an Indonesian primary school?

C. Operational Definitions

1. English Teaching Practice

English teaching practice in primary schools refers to classroom activities in which the teacher introduces, explains, and reinforces English vocabulary using interactive exercises and repetition to help young learner improve their ability to recognise and use words.

2. Classroom Observation

Classroom observation is the process of watching a teacher's performance in the classroom or learning environment. In this study, the researcher observed, recorded, and analysed the English language teaching process, specifically vocabulary teaching, in a primary school. The researcher observed vocabulary presentation techniques (introduction, explanation, reinforcement), the use of media, and various learning methods, as well as student responses and

engagement during the learning process. The objectives of the observation were to: evaluate the effectiveness of vocabulary teaching strategies for young learners, identify specific challenges in English language learning at the primary school level, and obtain data for the development of a learning model suited to the characteristics of primary school students in Indonesia.

D. Aim of the Study

The study aims to investigate the current implementation of English language teaching at the primary school level in Indonesia, with a specific focus on how effectively current teaching practices align with the principles of teaching English to young learners. The results provide a comprehensive picture of English teaching practices in Indonesian primary schools and identify areas for improvement in early English language education.

E. Significances of the Study

1. Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to the theory of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) by giving empirical evidence on how vocabulary teaching is implemented in Indonesian primary schools. The findings could confirm or enhance existing pedagogical frameworks for effective vocabulary teaching in early language education by systematically observing and analysing classroom practices, such as vocabulary presentation techniques (introduction, explanation, reinforcement), media use, and student engagement.

2. Practical Significance

This research provides practical advice for English teachers and policymakers by identifying effective vocabulary teaching strategies (e.g., interactive exercises, repetition techniques, and media use) that enhance young learners' comprehension and usage, highlighting specific challenges in vocabulary teaching within Indonesian primary schools, such as gaps between TEYL principles and actual classroom practices, and making recommendations for developing context.

3. Empirical Significance

The finding of this study serves as an additional reference for future research by documenting real-world vocabulary teaching practices through direct classroom observation rather than relying on self-reported data. It also creates an assessment framework for evaluating how well teaching methods align with TEYL principles in Indonesian primary schools. By highlighting significant gaps between curriculum objectives and classroom implementation, the study identifies specific areas that require further examination in early English language teaching. These empirical contributions will be valuable reference points for future studies on TEYL in comparable circumstances.