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## The Lesson Observation for the Productive Learning Environment in English Classes: Stories from Two Elementary Schools

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### Abstract

In Indonesia, English is not required for the elementary school students in the current curriculum. This qualitative case study examines the role of teachers in providing a productive learning environment through classroom activities in English classes at two elementary schools in Jambi, a province in Indonesia. The productive learning environment is characterised by target-oriented, genuine and real-based learning, encouraging and appealing activities, dynamic and accommodating knowledge formation, autonomous, and contemplative. The data were gathered from observations in 7 classes and teacher interviews. This research revealed that there was not a single meeting that altogether covered the six features of a productive learning environment. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers should understand more about a productive learning environment to empower classroom activities to help students achieve educational goals.

### Keywords

competency-based language teaching, lesson observation, productive learning

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## Introduction

In Indonesia, English is not compulsory for the elementary school level in the current curriculum (*Kurikulum 2013* or *K13*). However, schools can have it optionally as a local content subject. Some voices have revolved around justifying reasons to approve or disapprove of English as a subject in the elementary school curriculum. This study has been drawn from Cameron's standpoint (2001), who preferred a learning-centred approach to a child-centred approach to acknowledge children's potential in learning instead of their assumed limitation implied by the latter approach. Cameron (2001) followed Vygotsky, who believed that a child is an active learner in a world full of others who can maximise their learning potential through mediation and instruction. Cameron (2001) discussed several misunderstandings about teaching young learners. First, teaching children is considered straightforward. Second, children only need to learn a simple language. Cameron (2001) explained that teachers of English to young learners must understand children's inner mental world besides language knowledge, language teaching, and language learning. She also reminded us that we have assumed that children have minimal potential to learn English. They have been exposed to the global community through television and computer networking. Therefore, she contended that it is essential for adults around the children to facilitate them to reach their potential. Cooper (2010) argued that emphasising students has encouraged the teachers to act as facilitators and organisers of the learning process and recognise their students' learning styles. Nevertheless, Cameron (2001) proposed that although it is essential to acknowledge students' role in the learning process, teachers should also be reminded that their students can do more and better with their help. The teacher is a significant variable that influences students' learning (Lane, Pierson, & Givner, 2004). As Gattegno (1972) suggested, teaching means facilitating the learning process rather than controlling the process. Therefore, highly qualified teachers working with supporting organisational systems and suitable application of the instructional practice can serve their students at their best (Smith, Desimone, & Ueno, 2005). This statement aligns with Vygotsky's viewpoint about how teachers can support learning by planning what the students can learn and talking to the students in the classrooms (1978). Vygotsky called this process as utilising the zone of proximal development (ZPD).

This study, in particular, examines the role of teachers in providing a productive learning environment through classroom activities in English classes at two elementary schools in Jambi, a province in Indonesia. There has been scarce research on English language teaching in Indonesia conducting lesson observations. Therefore, it is crucial to fill the gap in the field. Furthermore, conducting classroom-based research like this current study is worth pursuing because it is anticipated to inform the teachers and the stakeholders about what teaching English to elementary students is like. Therefore, they can plan what will or will not work in their elementary schools and improve pre-service and postgraduate English teachers and programmes.

## Literature Review

### *Teaching English for students at elementary schools in Indonesia*

Currently English is still a foreign language and it is not part of the compulsory subjects in the elementary school curriculum. However, some schools are allowed to have an English subject although some voices have revolved around justifying reasons to approve or disapprove of English as a subject in the elementary school curriculum. It has been claimed that children who learn English at a younger age will have better results because they still have the capacity that helps them to acquire their first language, known as *the critical period hypothesis* (Cameron, 2001). However, demographic issues need to be considered. One-third of the Indonesian population is children (aged 0-17 years old), which is around 80 million kids. Of the total children population, according to the Indonesian Statistic Bureau (2018), more than half of them live in five provinces (18,6 % in Jawa Barat, 12,8 % in Jawa Timur, 12% in Jawa Tengah, 6,2 % in Sumatra Utara, and 4,4% in Banten) and 46 % live in 29 other provinces in Indonesia. As can be seen from the statistics, the children live in diverse areas of Indonesia where development and welfare vary. Some children reside in less developed provinces, regencies, districts, and villages where the opportunities to access education facilities are not the same as those in developed areas. Thus, it is very challenging for the schools and local government to provide qualified English teachers, the relevant books, and supporting facilities. Therefore, inserting English into the curriculum for all elementary schools in Indonesia ignores this demographic fact.

Nevertheless, schools in urban areas commonly have English as a local content subject, depending on the provincial education department's instruction. The approach used since the 2006 curriculum is competency-based language teaching (CBLT), which was imbued by the competency-based curriculum recommended by the Indonesian Government. Richards and Rodgers (2001) explain that this approach emphasises learners' autonomy to construct effective learning and focus on learning output. Thus, language learning aims for the students to demonstrate the ability to use the language in real-world use. Therefore, the students are encouraged to be active as the classes are student-centred, focusing on what students can do (Griffith & Lim, 2014).

However, it can be argued that teachers also have essential roles in preparing students to perform their skills along with other factors such as learning strategies, socioeconomic background, social interaction, and family support. Teachers facilitate students' opportunities to develop skills by providing knowledge transfer through appropriate teaching materials and media. Drawing from competency-based language teaching (CBLT) and a productive learning approach, the materials are given to the students must be authentic and task-related. Referring to what has been discussed previously, emphasising learning focus on students puts the teachers as facilitators to maximise the students' potential. Therefore, teachers are also in charge of providing their students with a productive learning environment. Primarily, teachers in Indonesia are currently encouraged to use technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) and higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) approach.

### *Productive learning environment*

This study observed classroom activities in two English classes at two elementary schools in Jambi, a province in Indonesia. This research analysed if the classroom activities supported a productive learning environment which is characterised by goal-oriented learning, authentic and reality-based learning, motivating and engaging activities, active and supportive knowledge construction, self-regulated, and reflective (De Corte, Verschaffel, & Masui, 2004; Ballantyne & Packer, 2009; Peltier, Hay, & Drago, 2005).

Furthermore, Cahyati and Madya (2019) reminded us that teaching and learning activities would be more effective if teachers considered the students' needs and backgrounds. By facilitating the students with appropriate material and media to learn English (as the input), the goal of English education in Indonesia, that is: students who can use English contextually (the output), will be generated better. Thus, this research specifically investigated what learning activities were experienced mainly by students in English classes and how those activities facilitated productive learning for students.

### **Methodology**

#### *Research design, site, and participants*

This research is a qualitative case study to provide data about the real-world situation, non-manipulative, non-controlling, emergent and purposeful to collect the intended data (Creswell, 2014). The data were collected through classroom observations in 7 English classes at two different schools (four classes from grades 1, 2, 5, and 6 at a public school, and three classes from grades 2, 4, and 5 at a private school) and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observation was deemed appropriate because they are a proper instrument for evaluating instructional practices and professional development. Furthermore, as Decristan et al. (2015) argued, scholars often use methods to find out aspects of teaching and investigate how they contribute to students learning or students' motivation. Meanwhile, the interview was acknowledged as a means to scrutinise one's independent thoughts and allow the participants to be open about their opinion and view (Adams, 2015).

#### *Data collection and analysis*

The researchers sent the parents the information letter and consent forms before the classroom observation. All the parents returned their consent for participation. The observations were recorded to help the researchers analyse the classes' occurrences comprehensively. Each English lesson was observed once. Right after the observation was completed, the researchers interviewed the teacher. The interview data were collected from four English teachers observed in the classes. The English teachers chosen in this study were selected based on the representativeness of each grade at public and elementary schools. The participants were interviewed individually once for around 30 minutes. They were

questioned about each lesson's learning objectives and the underlying reasons for chosen activities provided for the students. The interview processes were audio-recorded so that the researchers could pay careful attention and respond to the participants without the need to write down the information. The teachers' names were anonymous to protect the participants' privacy.

The video-recorded lessons collected from classroom observation were watched three times before they were discussed and analysed by the researchers. The researchers organised the classroom activities into major events in the class for discussion. The data from the interview was transformed into verbatim transcription. The researchers argue that verbatim transcription is necessary instead of selective transcription to help the researchers interpret the data. The researchers believe that the quality of the transcription influences the quality of the data analysis. The data was read three times before the researchers interpreted the data. The transcription data then was combined with the activities observed in the class to justify the analysis of the observation.

### ***Ethical consideration***

To keep the participants' safety, privacy, and confidentiality, any specific names of the participants and locations were masked.

### **Findings and Discussion**

As explained above, productive learning characteristics that were used as references to the findings of the observations are goal-oriented learning, authentic and reality-based learning, motivating and engaging activities, active and supportive knowledge construction, self-regulated, and reflective. This study also observed the seating arrangement because several studies (Haghighi & Jusan, 2012; van den Berg & Cillesen, 2015) have justified how it influences students' interaction and behaviour (such as hand-raising and asking questions). As Wannarka and Ruhl (2008) argued, the type of the task given and the characteristics of the students should be considered before arranging the students' desks. Therefore, each seating arrangement has distinctive potential to support students' productive learning.

### ***Grade 2 private school***

The English teacher for this English class is Ms *Ella* (not her real name). The classroom was designed with clustered and runway seating arrangements. Yet, the students were all asked to sit on the floor in rows and columns facing the front—twenty-two students in this class, consisting of 12 male and ten female students. The students worked on a listening test from the textbook *English Chest for grade 2*. The teacher combined four topics into a single test. The students had been asked to review the vocabulary and practice the pronunciation of the words at home. The test was to match the sentences in the audio with the written sentences in the book. The activities for the day are as the following:

- The students sat on the floor and took their books with them.
- The teacher turned the audio on for the test, and the students listened to the audio.

- The teacher played the audio recording twice, and the children double-checked their answers.
- The teacher then played a song, and the students listened to the song.
- The teacher and the students sang the song together several times.
- The students submitted their papers to the teachers.

Using the framework of productive learning, the classroom activities provided by the teachers in this study hardly met the characteristics of productive learning. The teacher relied on the students' learning capacity but not the student-centred approach suggested. Indeed, the students had been asked to review the vocabulary and practice the pronunciation at home. In the interview, teacher *Ella* admitted that she often asked the students to independently learn at home by listening to an audio recording supplied with the textbook. Yet, these students were only second-grade students aged around 7-8 years old and reviewing or memorising and practising the vocabulary or words are not the spirits of student-centred learning.

Moreover, although the test tested the students with the vocabulary they had reviewed at home, the context used in the test was not authentic and meaningful. It is traditional to have a list of vocabulary in textbooks and a gap-fill or matching activity (Hopkins & Nicoll, 2013). The words are easily etched in students' memory if they can relate to the words and their contexts (McKay, 2006). Therefore, Tickoo (2003) offered a term he called 'a web of association' for a process where "new word, word form and word meaning a strong base in the learners' mind" (p. 216). Memorising vocabulary is ineffective as students must encounter the words in contexts they usually use. However, it can serve as a mental practice for the students. Similarly, Cameron (2001) argued that teachers must support students in constructing meaning in every classroom activity and language use. Teacher *Ella* also explained that the purpose of playing the song and asking the students to listen to a children's song and sing it together was to calm their nerves after the listening test. She said,

"I played a song for the students to listen to after the test, and then we sang it together. They loved it, making them happy again after serious work."

Psychologically, it is acknowledged that music can reduce tension (Nakajima, Tanaka, Mima, & Izumi, 2016). Teacher *Ella* seemed to realise that her students enjoyed singing a song. However, perhaps she did not realise that she could use music and song more than just to relieve students' tension. This belief is understandable because there has been a lack of academic support known to teachers about the benefits of using songs in learning a second language.

#### ***Grade 4 private school***

The English teacher observed grade 4 at the private school whose teacher was Ms Fatimah (not her real name). The seating in the class was organised into 4 clusters. The total number of students in this class was 15, consisting of eight male and seven female students. Ms Fatimah said that the lesson for the day was project-based learning creating public signs (rules at home and public places) in English. The teacher explained that giving students the

project aimed to develop soft skills such as leadership, problem-solving, and critical and creative thinking.

"The school assigns us to help the students to create or produce something reflecting their learning outcomes. For example, we asked them to compose posters, and the students were excited because they liked drawing. We have discussed the topic before, so they proceed to create posters. They're practising how to be self-regulated, work with others, and think creatively by working on the project."

The lesson lasted for about 75 minutes. The summary of the activities in the class was as the following:

- The teacher began the class by introducing the topic.
- Students were asked to prepare the materials and stuff they needed, such as cardboard, colourful poster paper, scissors, colourful markers, pen, rulers and glue.
- The students then worked in a group of four to complete the project. They divided the work among those who drew the pictures, wrote the sign, coloured the pictures and sign, cut the cardboard, and cleaned up after work mess.

The seating arrangement was accurate because students worked in a group. Occasionally the students asked the teacher about several things related to the project. However, the conversations were all in *Bahasa Indonesia*. Therefore, it was hard to say that students benefitted from meaningful English from the activity except for written English they made. Although the teacher claimed she facilitated Project-Based Learning, the researchers argued that she did not run a PBL approach after comprehensive class observation. Instead, the students were merely doing a project. Ms Fatimah seemed to be misunderstood project-based learning with just doing a project in the class. Project-Based Learning is, as defined on the [pblworks.org](http://pblworks.org) page (September 2021), "a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge". In Project Based Learning, the students are experiencing the tools for gaining knowledge and skills permeating the curriculum and instruction.

Thus, the activity in this lesson was hardly categorised as PBL. The students' projects in the classroom did not start with driving questions or challenges and did not identify what the students needed to know about the inquiry. It contained minimal 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills in the activity but hardly gave room for students' voice and choice, did not provide any feedback from the teacher and room for students to revise. Moreover, although it produced a product, it would not be publicly presented beyond the classroom. Those missing characteristics differentiate Project-Based Learning from just doing a project in Ms Fatimah's classroom. In addition, merely drawing a poster of a public sign does not represent a real-world assessment choice. As a suggestion, the teacher can invite the students to present the public sign and explain the sign's condition. However, the class could be acknowledged to meet the characteristics of a productive learning environment. The students seemed motivated and engaged with the activities and independently regulated themselves to complete the task.

### *Grade 5 private school*

The primary textbook used for students in this class was *English Chest*. This book was designed thematically, focusing on basic vocabulary, listening practice, speaking and pronunciation, reading, writing, games, and songs. The English teacher for this class is also Ms *Fatimah*. The seats in this class were organised into five rows and four columns, all facing the front. This type of seating does not represent the student-centred learning approach but the teacher-centred one. However, this kind of seating arrangement could have positive potential. Wannarka and Ruhl (2008) explained that traditional seating arrangement in row potentially decreases students' misbehaviours and keep them on task. Recently, Tobia, Sacchi, Cerina, Manca, and Fornara's study (2020) suggested that students who sit at single desks have high logical reasoning, especially girls and lonely children who performed better in the theory of mind and creativity.

There were 17 students in the class, consisting of 10 male and seven female students. The class was scheduled for about 45 minutes, but it ran late because the previous class finished 15 minutes late. Before coming to the class, students were asked to learn the topics at home. The teacher encouraged the students to listen to the vocabulary audio recording to know how the words are pronounced and understand the meaning of the vocabulary listed. The order of activities in the classroom was summarised as follows:

- The lesson was begun with greetings in Arabic and English.
- The teacher introduced the list of vocabulary about the body parts.
- The students were asked to translate the words into *Bahasa Indonesia*.
- The teacher tested the students' memories of the vocabulary learned, showing its position in their bodies.
- The teacher asked the students to make simple sentences and asked those who voluntarily wrote their sentences on the whiteboard.
- The teacher asked the students to read the dialogue provided in the book, memorise it, and then practice it with their partners.
- The teacher then read out chunks of the dialogue and asked the students to respond with the missing dialogue parts.
- Students were asked to fill in the missing parts of sentences provided in the textbook.

Most of the time, the teacher and the students used *Bahasa Indonesia*, the Indonesian language. However, the teacher skipped the listening and pronunciation practice part because the class ran late. Teacher *Fatimah* in the interview session, explained that she regularly asked her students to practise their listening skills with a compact disk provided with the textbook at home. That was why she did not ask the students to do listening exercises. Teacher *Fatimah* said that the purpose of asking students to memorise the dialogues in 'the Body Parts' was to improve students' listening and pronunciation skills.

From the observation of this meeting, the teachers seemed to hold on to the traditional teaching approach and ignore the fact that she should provide the students with a room to use their higher-order thinking skills as the Indonesian Ministry of Education

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assigned. Furthermore, in competency-based language teaching (CBLT), students should learn to use the language as if they are in real situations. Therefore, the teacher instead exercised the grammar-translation method. She asked the students to translate the new English words into the Indonesian language, memorise vocabulary, create their sentences using the words, memorise and practice dialogue, and do fill-in-the-gap exercises in the textbook. She stated,

"I asked the students to memorise the vocabulary and practise the sentences. I believe the students found the activities challenging because they felt a sense of competition with their friends who can memorise more."

Although the students in this grade are a bit older, they are still categorised as young learners. Teachers of English to young learners should be reminded that their students will acquire the target language if the environment facilitates them because they learn from the activities experience (Moon, 2005). Traditionally, the objective of the grammar-translation method was to train the students to read English literature. The teacher was the authority in the classroom, as observed at this grade 5 private school. The interaction that occurred in the class was also from teacher to students, where the teachers kept asking the students to do tasks to acquire the teacher's knowledge and skills. Possibly, the activity where the teacher asked the students to show their body parts could be acknowledged as authentic and reality-based learning by utilising the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach. Yet, this approach is probably not any closer to a productive learning environment or competency-based language teaching (CBLT).

### *Grade 1 public schools*

The class teacher observed in this public school is Ms *Nang* (not her real name). The seats were arranged into rows and columns facing the front. The total number of students in this class was 23, consisting of 11 male and 13 female students. The lesson observed was around 60 minutes. On the day of observation, the students learned about colour from *Stairway*, the textbook used. The activities during the lesson are as the following:

- The teacher started the lesson by asking the students to sing the *Head, Shoulder, Knees, and Toes* song, count the numbers, and spell the alphabet.
- The teacher asked the students to identify the colour of the items in English in their classroom.
- The teacher then randomly asked students to show their identified items and colours.
- The teacher wrote the students' colours on the whiteboard and asked them to write them in their notebooks.
- The teacher then organised the students into four groups, and she came to each group to show the pen markers and the markers so that they could mention what colour the markers were.
- The teacher then again showed all students the markers one by one and asked the students to mention the colour of the markers.

- The teacher then organised the students again into three groups. Each group had to mention the colour of the items in their classroom and pronounce them correctly.
- The teacher then chose three markers randomly then asked each group to send their representative to write the colour's words on the whiteboard.

Ms *Nang*, in the interview session, explained that she always started the lesson by asking the students to sing together to lift the students' enthusiasm before studying, even though the song choice did not match the topic that day. She argued,

"The children love to play, sing, and do other energetic activities. So I don't want to adhere to the textbook rigidly."

Then, as revealed from the activities observed, Ms *Nang* began the session by asking the students to identify the surrounding objects' colours in English. Luckily some students recognised some of the colours of the objects. After that, Ms *Nang* wrote down the colours mentioned by the students on the whiteboard. In the next activity, as observed, Ms *Nang* asked the students to guess the colour of markers, pronounce them correctly, and write the colour words on the whiteboard.

The activity could be the other way around. First, the teacher could show the students the markers and explain the colours as the introductory phase. The vocabulary needs to be introduced first for these young learners. After the students understood the colour words, the teacher could ask them to identify the objects' colour around them, which was the recognition phase. Then, the teacher can expand the students' answers by inviting them to mention any objects and their colours. This approach can boost the students' critical thinking. The students could also be led to the production phase, where they are asked to choose what colour of specific objects before actually writing down the colour words in their books. Nevertheless, teacher's activities could be considered fulfilling aspects of productive learning activities since they engaged the students in motivating activities and authentic, active and supportive knowledge construction.

### ***Grade 2 public school***

The book used for grade 2 in this public school was *Stairway*. The teacher was also Ms *Nang*. The seating arrangement was designed in rows and columns facing the teacher in the front. Thirty students consisted of 13 male students and 17 female students. On the observation day, the students were learning about antonyms. The activities observed were as follows:

- The teacher opened the class by providing examples of antonym words and their translation in *Bahasa Indonesia*.
- The teacher then wrote several words on the whiteboard, and the students voluntarily wrote the antonyms.
- The teacher and the students checked the antonyms together
- The teacher then asked the students to fill out the exercises in the book.
- The teacher asked students voluntarily to write the answers on the whiteboard.

The chosen seating arrangement for the students on the day of observation seems based on customary reasons so that the teacher could quickly check the students and point them to do the tasks. There was no activity to encourage students' logical reasoning, let alone creativity. Cameron (2001) reminded us that learners who learn a new language would not improve a full range of foreign languages if they relied solely on their teachers and texts. Thus, if we expect the young learners to do specific skills, they must experience them. The teacher practised the traditional grammar-translation method, emphasising having the students gain the vocabulary and know the translation forms in the *Indonesian* language. From the observation, this class did not meet the criteria for productive learning or competency-based language teaching (CBLT). *Ms Nang* claimed,

"It was tough to find authentic materials to teach antonym; therefore, I asked the students to find the opposite words of words that I wrote on the whiteboard."

This claim, however, is not necessarily valid. The teacher, for example, can invite several students to express what they felt or saw and then ask other students to respond oppositely. In addition, it will encourage the students to have higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) relevant to competency-based language teaching. Since the students in this class are 7-8 years old, the teacher could also utilise visual aids and demonstrations to help the students learn new vocabulary because human memory for objects and pictures is strong (Altakhaineh & Hajjo, 2019). Furthermore, the teacher could also group the students to facilitate group work activities by playing picture games. The teacher could also invite the students to do physical movements. This activity will encourage students to work collaboratively and support shy students to participate in the activities.

### ***Grade 5 public school***

The seat formation of this class was designed into six clustering tables. The teacher was Mr *Law*. The class run for about 30 minutes. Students learned from the textbook *Stairway* for grade 5. The activities were as follows:

- The teacher introduced the day's topic, 'Ask someone to help in the kitchen, ' translating it into *Bahasa Indonesia*.
- The students were asked to review the vocabulary in the textbook related to the topic.
- The teacher played the audio player and asked the students to listen to the pronunciations of the words.
- The students were asked to pronounce the words aloud.
- The teacher and the students discussed the words by translating them into *Bahasa Indonesia*.
- The students completed the exercise in the book: matching the words and the pictures available.
- The teacher and the students checked the correct answers together.

- The students were asked to practice the dialogues provided in the textbook in pairs.

Mr *Law*, in the interview, explained that he asked the students to listen to the audio recordings of the related words and read the dialogue aloud to help the students improve their listening and pronunciation skills. He said,

"I usually give them a list of words, and I ask them to listen how to pronounce them, then I give them practices such as read the dialogue, or fill in the blank in a sentence."

These techniques implied that the teacher is the source of all language learning activities. However, the students were instructed to practice the dialogues in the book. To Stevick's concern (1993), students might receive the message that they should use their brain function to copy instead of creating. From the observation, it was evident that Mr *Law* utilised the grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods in his class. This method facilitates learning through habit formation (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). It trains the students with the grammatical sentence patterns drill, and with positive reinforcement, students are expected to build accurate habits. Although this audio-lingual method has lost popularity over communicative language teaching, the researchers would argue that teachers can make their own decisions about what methods they implement in their classrooms. These could be informed by their experiences, professional training, others' research, and most importantly, their students' understanding.

### ***Grade 6 public school***

The classroom seat arrangement was designed like a horseshoe or letter U. There were 23 students in the class, six male students and 17 female students. On the day of observation, the students learned about 'Present Perfect Tense' from Stairway's textbook used in this grade. The teacher was also Mr *Law*, and the class ran for about 60 minutes. The list of activities was as follows:

- The teacher began the class by explaining the formula of the Present Perfect Tense and how to create positive, negative and interrogative sentences.
- The teacher asked the students to mention their daily activities in the *Indonesian* language that could be transformed into the Present perfect Tense.
- Students then were asked to complete exercises in the textbook, where they wrote positive, negative, and interrogative sentences of Present Perfect Tense.
- The students were asked to write the answers on the whiteboard voluntarily.
- The teacher checked the answers the students had written on the whiteboard.
- The students were asked to write simple paragraphs that present perfect sentences in their notebooks and submit them to their teacher.

Teacher *Law* said that he asked the students to write present perfect sentences related to their daily activities because he wanted to facilitate the students to construct the knowledge by using examples related to their lives.

"I want the students to be able to use present perfect tense in daily life. So first I explained the formula, then I asked them to do the tasks in the book and write their sentences related to their daily experiences."

This opinion is valid since children are mentally active learners who constantly attempt to find meaning and activities assigned to them (Cameron, 2001). But sometimes, teachers must recognise that not all students can quickly grasp the intention of certain activities. They could pretend they understand to please their teacher or be too concerned to clarify. This situation, in turn, will likely disadvantage students in the long term, as the actual situation will emerge, for example, at the final exam or even worse after graduating from school. The students still cannot utilise the instructions they have received.

In this class, teacher *Lam* executed the grammar-translation method. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) explained that historically, studying the grammatical structure of the target language will help students recognise their own language's grammar, which helps them write and speak better in their language. Another potential benefit of learning foreign language grammar is that it helps students read and understand literature written in a foreign language. However, as reflected in this Grade 6 public school, little attention is given to speaking and listening, emphasising that students learned the grammar. The teacher acted as the authority and source of knowledge, and the students followed the teacher's instruction with little interaction. Their interaction mainly occurred when the teacher issued the task to the students and corrected their answers related to the assignments.

### Conclusion

In this study, we have observed seven English classrooms to examine the productive learning environment provided by the teachers in public and private elementary schools. Observing teachers and students in the classroom running their teaching and learning activities is proven to help improve the quality of education by providing a complete understanding of what is happening in the class. It is revealed that there are several discrepancies between the objectives of the English curriculum and classroom practices. The teachers struggled to provide the students with a productive learning environment to facilitate students' use of the language, especially when the teachers were not ready with knowledge about their students' characters. Thus, the objectives of the curriculum are also at stake.

This small-scale research could be argued for its constraint for generalisation. However, classroom-based research like the current study must be conducted to inform real situations in the classroom to raise awareness among all stakeholders in the Indonesian educational structure. This awareness, in turn, is expected to inform public education stakeholders in Indonesia to develop a policy regarding the planning of English teaching and learning in elementary schools in Indonesia. After all, this study is expected to positively contribute to improving teacher training and education programs for English majors.

### Disclosure statement

The authors reported no potential conflict of interest.

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