

**Indonesian primary school teacher methods for the thematic learning of  
*Kurikulum 2013: A case study***

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**Abstract:** In Indonesian context, the implementation of its new curriculum called *Kurikulum 2013* (K-13) by primary school teachers was firstly begun in 2013. Thematic learning which is one of the compulsory parts for the teaching and learning processes becomes a great challenge especially for primary school teachers in the country. This case study was held in Banten, an Indonesian province aiming to understand kinds of teaching methods used by four Indonesian primary teachers in teaching to achieve thematic learning who voluntarily agreed to the study participants. Data collection was done using semi-structured interview with all participants while the data analysis was mainly conducted through thematic besides transcription and coding. The findings of the study informed four themes; teachers' understanding of K-13, types of teaching methods used by the teachers, thematic integrated learning, the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the K-13. Recommendations were informed for all stakeholders (e.g. teachers, principals, and administrators) for the betterment of Indonesian education.

**Keywords:** *Kurikulum 2013*, teaching method, thematic learning, lecture method.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Indonesian government through the Ministry of Education launched a new curriculum called K-13 which has been implemented since July 2013. Several aspects expected in this curriculum were to form productive, creative, innovative and competent human resources through strengthening competencies and attitudes domains both socially and spiritually, skill, and knowledge (*Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*, Kemendikbud RI, 2018). K-13 aims to change the view of learning from a teacher-centered approach to a student-based approach with competency-based assessments that are based on authentic curriculum or authentic assessment. In the previous curriculum, the education system in Indonesia used a curriculum prepared at the school level or better known as the Education Unit Level Curriculum (KTSP). KTSP was implemented since July 2006 and it was developed by each school, according to school conditions, regional characteristics, socio-cultural characteristics, and students (Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the national education system). Regarding the implementation of this curriculum, schools have full authority and responsibility to develop strategies and set priorities in education (Retnawati, Hadi, & Nugraha, 2016).

The curriculum change certainly experienced the agreement and disagreement from teachers and students so that they created a real gap between the use of the two curriculums which in fact showed that there was a gap between expectations and outputs produced, in this case, students, who focused on cognition but lacking in moral character (Rumahlatu, Huliselan, & Takaria, 2016). The existence of K-13 is expected to bring changes in overcoming the gaps that have occurred in the world of education. There are four major changes in K-13 compared to the previous curriculums, including 1) curriculum concepts that include a balance between hard skills and soft skills starting from competency standards, standard content, standard processes, and standards, 2) *integrated learning*; 3) learning process, and 4) the assessment process" (Kemendikbud RI, 2014).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **K-13**

According to Hidayat (2017) The K-13 is the development of the previous curriculum or KTSP. Indonesia has changed the curriculum eleven times from 1945. The dynamics of curriculum changes are the result of change and adaptation in the political, social, economic and technological system. Therefore, the curriculum is a set of educational plans that need to be developed dynamically according to the demands and changes that occur in the community (Hidayat, 2017). Changes or curriculum development show that the education system is dynamic and adapted to the times. All aspects of the change and development of K-13 do not only strengthen subjects but also overcome the challenges of change and development.

### **Integrated theme learning**

The origin of the integrated curriculum was derived from the concept of the curriculum from within the class that needs to have relevance to real life in the circumstances and society (Clark & Braun, 2013). In the 1970s, Gibbons and Phillips (1979) emphasized on strengthening the curriculum in the classroom, for example in a partial teaching, curriculum transferred into integrated form as a thematic teaching of learning, would be useful for students to reduce the burden of the subject taught. As a result, the students became more focused on their skills such as Mathematics skills. Many studies have informed that integration learning increases students with learning experiences. Typically, an example of an integrated curriculum is the assimilation of math and science lessons. Furner and Kumar (2007) that offer a form of mathematical and scientific integration based on problem-solving methods, have a perception that mathematics has an essential role in helping students to know and understand the correlation between significant scientific issues.

## **METHODS**

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, I adopted a case study approach (Creswell, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990) to examine the experiences Indonesian primary school teacher methods for the thematic learning

of K-13 since the quantitative research traditions e.g. surveys may not give in-depth information to obtain the purpose of this study. Johnson and Christensen (2008), Creswell (2007), and Merriam (1998) defined case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bound system. Furthermore, Merriam (1998) wrote that a qualitative case study was an intensive and holistic description, explanation, and analysis of "a bounded system" (p. 27) or phenomenon such as a person, a program, an institution, a process, a social unit, a group, and a policy. For Creswell (1998), the bounded system can be restricted by time and place and the case can be a program, an activity, or individuals. In this study, I focused on exploring the experiences of primary school teachers in implementing methods for thematic learning of K-13, the newest curriculum of Indonesian education.

### **Participants**

I conducted our current research at involving four third and fourth-grade teachers from four primary schools consisting of 3 private schools and one state schools in Serang, Pandeglang and Cilegon areas in Banten province. The names of people, places, and research site were masked through the use of pseudonyms in order to protect the rights of participants. In this study, a purposeful sampling with a convenience case strategy was used. Creswell (2007) wrote, "convenience cases, which represent sites or individuals from which researcher can access and easily collect data" (p. 126). At the beginning, I planned to recruit 7-10 teachers, however, only four teachers agreed to participate in the study. Four participants were three females (Ani, Tia, Intan) and 1 male (Rico).

### **Data collection**

The primary data were collected using a semi-structured interview, conducted individually with each teacher for approximately one hour at each school. Additionally, the face-to-face interview for every participant was not only done for once since it was based on the participants' decision. During the interview, I began asking participants to talk about their experiences related to topic of the study. Each teacher was interviewed in Bahasa Indonesia to ease the opinion delivery (Merriam, 1998). To support the interview data, I also addressed a demographic background question to get information participants' backgrounds including age, gender, semester, and others.

### **Data Analysis**

For the analysis of the data, I analyzed the demographic data descriptively while the interview data were transcribed individually and then analyzed by using the constant comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). All the transcripts among the four participants were analyzed and compared to search similarities and differences. The transcripts were carefully reread line-by-line in order to see regularities and emerging themes and subthemes of. Once the coding and analysis were done, I started to identify how themes and sub-themes help us to explain our research questions. During this process, I also deleted overlapping and repetitive data.

In this study, I used pattern coding to find mostly repetitive patterns of statements and consistencies among participants. This approach was chosen to help us find patterns and regularity of participants' statements. Finally, to maintain the credibility of the inquiry or the "trustworthiness" (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 300), I conducted individual interviews lasting approximately one hour and to verify the accuracy of the data, findings, and interpretations (Creswell, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). I checked not only with the eleven participants but also with our colleagues that served as member checking

## **FINDINGS**

Four themes emerged from the final analysis of this case study; teachers' understanding of K-13, types of teaching methods used by the teachers, thematic integrated learning, the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the K-13.

### **Teacher's understanding of K-13**

The first theme was teachers' understanding of K-13. The orientation of K-13 is an improvement and balance between attitudes of efficiency, skills, and knowledge. One of the participants stated,

"K-13 is the development of the 2006 KTSP curriculum or the previous curriculum. There are four aspects added in this curriculum; religious personality, social attitudes, skills, and knowledge", (Intan)

"K-13 is an improvement from the previous curriculum, KTSP 2006. Basically, all curriculums that have been set are good. K-13 is newly being applied for all schools in Indonesia, some weaknesses and imperfections in its implementation need to be considered and evaluated". (Ani)

Teachers in this study still considered K-13 as a new curriculum that is still being tried for its implementation in all Indonesian schools. The emphasis on student-centered learning should be informed and improved by addressing appropriate trainings. As one of the participants (Rico) said that he was a bit nervous and confused about the student-centered learning focus because he used to teach traditionally which lecture was usually applied in his classroom.

### **Types of teaching methods used by teachers**

The second theme is the type of teaching method used by the teacher. At one of the private primary school, one of the teachers (Tia) informed that she had used an appropriate method that was consistent with K-13 guidelines; however, it was hard to adjust with the condition and situation in the classroom. She admitted that she applied simulation, discussion, and scientific experiment in order to make the teaching and learning process suitable or in line with the K-13.

Other three teachers admitted that they still used traditional teaching strategies

such as lecture and homework in teaching their students. One of the three teachers informed,

“What has been done by the government has been good since students today tend to have more ability to become independent learners. They focus on more in their learning through technology. However, for teacher like me, traditional teaching is still often implemented”, (Intan)

A problem emerged as informed by one of the participants of the study in line with the types of teaching used for the K-13 implementation. The conventional teaching method is liked by most of the teachers. Tia informed,

“I work in a school where facilities are very limited to support the K-13 implementation. Therefore, most teachers in my school prefer conventional teaching compare to what is being offered in the curriculum”. (Tia)

### **Thematic Learning**

The thematic learning is part of K-13 where one of the participants of this study comprehended basic understanding of the thematic learning; however, they admitted some difficulties implementing the learning in primary schools.

“I do understand the concept of thematic learning but it is hard to implement. One of the discouraging factors is the limited availability of supporting infrastructure and learning environment in our school. We cannot make it without a good environment and facilities”, (Intan)

Another teacher revealed that it was not impossible to implement thematic learning in the primary school she taught. She informed,

“The thematic learning is always my focus. Even though, I always applied traditional or conventional teaching and learning in my teaching. I can combine the thematic learning into the process by including the thematic leaning into my lecture” (Rico)

The thematic learning emphasizes the core aspect on the evaluation process of the final report of the students’ achievement at the end of the semester. It is a burden for teachers for the duty. Teachers still do many administrative affairs and assigned to give an appropriate teaching and learning process in accordance with the K-13. One of the teachers had her opinion,

“What I concern most is the evaluation process for the K-13 implementation. We cannot do things at once. Doing many things out of

the context of teaching is very frustrating and tiring. In addition, we have to follow what the curriculum regulate". (Tia)

### **Effectiveness of teaching and learning in the K-13**

The voice projection, tone and vocal character of each teacher and the comprehensibility and appearance including way of dress of each of them are all items in this part for the effectiveness of the K-13. They informed that they were sitting in the desk in front of the class far from student desks where there were more than 20 students and had no problems projecting their voice. One of the participants added,

"Sometimes I must yell to get the situation and condition in the teaching and learning process to be more conducive. However, they are all good students. I think all students can hear my voice clearly. To make sure, you should ask them, especially those sitting in the back row of the class". (Rico)

Even though all the teachers had done their best to project their voice tone and volume, they still had problems. The situation outside of the classroom influences the background noise level and hence the receptive ability of the students. The other holdback that occurred in the classrooms was those located in between or next to a sports-field. The loud noises and shouting by the students and their instructors doing physical exercises created an uncomfortable situation in the adjacent classrooms due to the high background noise.

Delivering polite, straightforward and easy to understand words must be conducted done in the teaching-learning process in line with the curriculum. Based on the results of the interview, each teacher admitted that their words were easy to understand and no inappropriate or taboo words, phrases, and sentences used in their teaching, no racism, sexism, etc. One of the participants said,

"Certainly, we use polite words, straight forward and easy words. It is a teacher's need to do to never use bad, taboo or swear words and to use good language". (Intan)

Teachers have to dress modestly, cleanly, and tidily to meet the requirements of for the effectiveness of the K-13. All these teachers reported that they always wore their official uniforms; the teachers said that they always dressed properly in the classroom. They never broke the rules because they believe that they are must set an example for their students. Two of the teachers added,

"I wear appropriate dress on daily basis, and I think it is appropriate to have well-dressed clothes since we have to manage a good example for our students. Not to mention pants, wristwatches, and belts. But batik is the best thing to wear every Friday and Saturday". (Rico)

Another important thing in line with the effectiveness of the K-13

implementation is the coordination process carried out by the teachers, students, and schools administrators. K-13 has advantages and disadvantages of learning, facilities, and methods. K-13 has adapted to the student's time and development, for example, the application of e-learning and communication technologies that facilitate learning for students. Besides, character education patterns and attitudes are emphasized in the curriculum. Therefore, students do not only focus on the development of cognitive aspects but also attitudes and behaviors. One of the interview participants emphasized,

“K-13 focus is more about students’ independence in learning. Technology supporting is very important for this kind of curriculum implementation. E-learning is one of the examples of how we can use the tool for the teaching and learning development”. (Intan)

## **DISCUSSION**

This manuscript provides empirical findings about the implementation of K-13 in Indonesian primary schools perceived by four teachers teaching in four different schools. The thematic analysis which covers teachers’ understanding of K-13, types of teaching methods used by the teachers, thematic integrated learning, the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the K-13 have not yet been in accordance with the Curriculum.

Learning methods and approaches that teachers often use revealed in this study are lectures, discussions, and experimental methods where lecture is the dominant one. This lecture method is considered conventional, and the response to the student seems dull, and the learning style focused on the teacher that cannot trigger the creativity of the students during teaching and learning activities. Learning should be done innovatively and enable children to be active in learning as stated in the guideline of K-13. Empowering students is required in K-13 because the students need rewards or appreciation from their teachers. These rewards are essential for teachers as long as they are still within the boundaries and done to trigger students' creativity in learning. Students in the third and fourth grade of the primary school are active and have much energy to move actively. The teacher should adapt with the condition and suit their teaching with the curriculum in order to make the students to be active.

Moyles (1992) explains the features of effective teachers found in research in Britain and the United States. He found that their class organizational and management includes, creating a conducive environment for positive and consistent learning, comprehensive planning and the provision of curriculum and progress frameworks, using a variety of classroom, group and individual teaching methods, systematic source and material organization, having a class organization for curriculum requirements, having a solid class classroom routine, various performances and activities, lively teaching personalities, make efficient use of time, create self-presentation standards and classes, spirited performances and precise tasks with good pacing and flow, as well as clarity of learning goals and sharing with children.

Providing useful feedback to students for their learning achievement and

helping children to assess themselves as students, encourage children to be independent and learning for them as intrinsic motivation, have high hopes for all children in respect of both activity and behavior. Adapting learning to the needs and assessments to inform planning, synthesize and analyze the theory of teaching/learning and classroom practice, continuous evaluation of the teaching and learning environment (Dean, 2000). In relation to the effective teaching in the classroom, teachers have revealed that their dress, voice projection, and words have been in line with the curriculum.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Primary school students still have a very high incentive and tend to be less focused when teachers teach through lecture methods. Kyriacou (1986) reported the dangers of lecture methods because young students cannot concentrate for a long time. Exposition needs follow-up involving action for students to make the material to be more interesting (Dean, 2000). Therefore, with this study, the teachers are expected to follow the scientific instruction by following government regulations that enable the ability of primary school students to: observe, ask, collect information, associate and communicate. Even from the data obtained that there are teachers who have implemented other learning methods such as preliminary experiments, discussions, and role play, but the teachers mostly use lectures on daily basis. With this study, teachers are expected to be aware of the reform in teaching methods that are appropriate with the guidance of the K-13.

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