

AN ANALYSIS ON THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' ABILITY IN IMPLEMENTING THEMATIC APPROACH

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Abstract: An Analysis on The Elementary School Teachers' Ability in Implementing Thematic Approach. The Regulation of Minister National of Education Republic of Indonesia Number 40 Year 2007 states the implementation of thematic approach in the teaching and learning process at the elementary school level. Dealing with the implementation of Curriculum 2013, the implementation of thematic approach could not be hindered. The teachers have to implement the thematic approach as the professional career. This research was aimed at: 1) analyzing the teachers' understanding on the thematic approach, 2) capturing the teachers' practice in implementing thematic approach, and 3) gaining information on the teachers' difficulties in implementing thematic approach. The study was a descriptive qualitative. The subject of the research was the 1st up to the 3rd grade elementary school teachers of the three elementary schools at Bangkinang Kota. The data were gathered by interview and observation technique. Triangulation was done through Forum Group Discussion among the researchers, the teachers, and the headmasters. The findings of the research were classified into conceptual and practical. Conceptually, the teachers have a good understanding on the thematic approach, but practically were not at all. 6 of 9 teachers have been implemented thematic approach in the learning and teaching process. The teachers were also met the difficulties in implementing the approach.

Keywords: *the ability of teachers, elementary school teachers, thematic approach.*

Abstrak: Analisis Kemampuan Guru Sekolah Dasar Dalam Implementasi Pembelajaran Tematik. Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Nomor 41 tahun 2007 mengisyaratkan penggunaan pendekatan tematik dalam pembelajaran kelas 1 sampai kelas 3 Sekolah Dasar (SD). Bahkan dewasa ini pasca diberlakukannya Kurikulum 2013, pendekatan tematik wajib diimplementasikan dari kelas 1 sampai kelas 6 pada proses pembelajaran. Adalah menjadi hal yang penting bagi guru SD untuk dapat melaksanakan pendekatan tematik sebagai tanggung jawab profesi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk: 1) menganalisis pemahaman guru SD tentang pendekatan tematik, 2) mendapatkan profil kemampuan guru SD dalam melaksanakan pendekatan tematik, dan 3) mengetahui hambatan-hambatan guru dalam mengimplementasikan pendekatan tematik di SD. Penelitian menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan subjek penelitian guru kelas 1 sampai kelas 3 di tiga SD Kecamatan Bangkinang Kota. Data dikumpulkan dengan observasi dan wawancara. Triangulasi dilakukan melalui *focus group discussion* antara peneliti, guru, dan kepala sekolah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa secara konsep guru memahami pendekatan tematik dengan baik, namun pada pelaksanaannya 6 dari 9 orang guru yang diteliti tidak melaksanakan pendekatan tematik dalam pembelajaran. Penelitian ini juga mengungkapkan bahwa sebagian besar guru mengalami kendala dalam mengimplementasikan pendekatan tematik pada proses pembelajaran.

Kata Kunci: kemampuan guru, guru Sekolah Dasar, pendekatan tematik

INTRODUCTION

Before the Regulation of the Minister National of Education Number 22 Year 2006 is introduced, the teaching and learning process in the elementary school were carried out separately in the

early grade (I,II,II), such as 2 hours (2 x 35 minutes) for teaching Social and Science (IPS), Civic Learning (PKn) and Bahasa Indonesia. This type of learning causes the difficulties on the students to associate the information holistically.

Besides, the high numbers of the repeating class students and even dropout was also found. The Data from Ministry of National Education in 1999/2000 showed the number of repeating class students in Indonesia are 11.6% of the 1st grade, 7.51% of the 2nd grade, 6.13% of the 3rd grade, 4.64% of the 4th grade, 3.1% of the 5th grade and 0.37% of the 6th grade. In the same year, the numbers of dropout students are 4.22% of the 1st grade, 0.83% of the 2nd grade, 2.27% of the 3rd grade, 2.71% of the 4th grade, 3.79% of the 5th grade, and 1.78% of the 6th grade. It can be concluded that the number of repeated class and dropout students for the early grade is higher than the primary level.

Dealing with the situation, the government introduces the Regulation of the Minister of National Education Number 22 Year 2006. The implication of the regulation is the changing of the teaching approach for the early grade students, namely thematic approach. Thematic learning is the integrated teaching approach based on the selection of theme or topic of study. It is expected that the implementation of thematic approach ease the students to associate the information during the learning processes.

Piaget (cites in Joni, 1996) states that the early grade students were in a period of early age at the time the ability of children to get along with the abstract things was generally only formed at the age when they sat in the last grade and developed further at the age of Junior High School. Therefore, the teaching experience that involves the connection between the conceptual elements, both senses and fields of study will create the more effective learning. In line with the statement above, National Education Department (2006:1) states that most of

the elementary students are difficult to associate the knowledge and the practice of the knowledge itself. Due to the situation, thematic learning is expected to be a solution of the problems. Since the thematic approach involves inquiry in the learning process, the students are engaged to bring the ideas of the information. Internalizing the real experience in the learning process helps the students to understand the information by associating the common knowledge.

However, there is a gap between the expectation; the theory of thematic learning and the factual condition. The researcher which is also the lecturer assigned a task on the students to do an observation to figure out the learning process in the elementary school in Bangkinang Kota, it was found that some teachers do not implement thematic approach in teaching the early grade students. Moreover, some other teachers do not have idea on thematic learning. They do not understand what thematic learning is. It will causes the bad effect on the teaching learning process for the early grade students; I,II,and III. Dealing with the factual condition above, research on the implementation of thematic learning is necessary to be conducted at Elementary School in Bangkinang Kota.

Based on the background of the problem above, three questions are formulated as follow: 1). How is the teachers' understanding on thematic approach? 2) How is the implementation of the thematic approach in Bangkinang Kota? And 3) what are the teachers' problems in implementing thematic learning?

Thematic Learning

Winkel (cites in Sutikno, 2009:31) states

that learning is an act in gaining the information by considering the external and internal factors of the students. Learning is a kind of interaction between the teacher and the student to reach the learning goal in a certain period of time (Hamalik, 2007:162).

Thematic learning is the integration of various topics into a specific theme. Sutirjo and Mamik Sri Istuti (cites in Suryosubroto, 2009:133) state that thematic is a kind of process of integrating conceptual, psychomotor, affective, and creative thinking into a specific learning topic.

According to Sri Anitah (2009:233) thematic learning is a teaching strategy which is integrate various topics to have the students in hands-on experience. The goal of thematic learning is the availability of the conducive, enjoyable and meaningful learning. The characteristics of thematic learning are the flexibility, the integration of the various learning topics, the development of the students' potential, the development of the students' creativity, and social activity.

Principles of Thematic Learning

Trianto (2012:85-86) lists the principles of thematic learning, namely thematic exposure principle; the major principle of thematic learning. There are some considerations in selecting the theme in thematic learning, they are: 1) The theme should be specific to ease the teacher in selecting the topics, 2) The theme should be in relation each other, 3) The theme should be committed with the students' psychology, 4). The theme should be in line with the students' potential, 5) The authentic learning activities should take into account, 6) The theme should be in balance with the curriculum and the society expectation,

7) The theme is also should be considered on the availability of the teaching and learning material.

The principle of learning management, the teacher should internalize the whole learning process into themselves, meaning that they should act as facilitator or mediator. Prabowo (cites in Trianto,2012:85) in managing the learning process, the teacher acts as: (1) The teacher is better not being a single actor; (2) The instruction given in deciding the individual responsibility in a group work; (3) The teacher should be accommodate the ideas excluded the planning.

Principle of Evaluation, in the integrated learning evaluation, the following measures are required: (1) the students should be given an opportunity to have self-evaluation, in addition to other evaluation; and (2) the teacher should teach the students to evaluate the learning accomplishment collectively according to the criteria of the defined objectives.

The principle of reaction, the teacher should react to the students' action in all of learning activities but should not direct them to narrow aspect but to an impaired and meaningful unity.

Meanwhile, Suryosubroto (2009,133-134) states that the basic principles of thematic learning are: 1) contextual or integrated, 2) the proper learning activity, 3) efficient in time, material, method, and the use of the authentic material.

Procedures of Thematic Learning

As an approach of learning, there are three procedures on thematic learning as proposed by Trianto (2007) namely, Planning, Acting and Evaluating. Further explanation is as follows:

Planning, the teacher needs to decide the topic, select the learning material, the learning activity and the learning evaluation at the beginning of the lesson. 1) Deciding the topic is the first step on thematic learning. Three ways are considered as the way to decide the topic of learning, namely (a) the teacher herself decides the topic of learning, (b) the students themselves decide the topic of learning, and (c) the teacher and the students decide the learning topic. 2) Identifying and selecting the learning material, choosing the appropriate learning material relates to the learning topic and could be explored by the students easily. It can be (a) printed material such as book, magazine, newspaper, graph, etc; (b) the original and the imitation such as media, miniature, environment, etc. 3) Choosing the learning activity, the learning topic and the learning outcomes determines the learning activity. For example, the topic is about the school environment, the teacher design observation and interview as the learning activities. The other example is about water. The students may experience an experiment, observation and interview. 4) Evaluation, the learning outcome and the students' learning activity determines the appropriate learning evaluation. The evaluation includes product, performance, portfolio, and project. The evaluation techniques is observation which is the instruments are observation checklist, Likert-scale, test and interview.

Acting, this step begins with: 1) displaying topic. In thematic learning the way the topic displayed depends on the way to select the topic. If the topic is selected by the teacher, the teacher's explanation follow it, while if it is

selected by the students, some questions will be given by the students related to the intended learning outcome, and so on. 2) Sharing opinion, it is the main activity which has strong relation with the integration of topic into sub topic. The students share the intended learning activity actively, while the teacher creates a framework about the topic and sub topics. 3) Creating learning agreement, the last grade students are suggested to create a learning agreement based on the following learning topic, but for the early grade the teacher comes with the learning activities which are set up in the main activity. 4) Data collection and Data Analysis, it is an exploration activity on the learning topic or sub topics relates to the selected learning materials and activities. 5) Displaying learning outcome, it is the final step of thematic learning. It is called culmination. The students are asked to show the students' learning outcome, whether in form of presentation, demonstration or exhibition.

Evaluating, this step discusses two main point: 1) focus on evaluation target, the thematic learning is not only focus on the learning outcome and the cognitive skill, but also focus on the process of learning. 2) Evaluation technique, as it is known that thematic learning focus on both of learning activities and learning outcome, it is needed for having a comprehensive learning evaluation. The use of non-test technique besides test is necessary. It is good for the teacher to get the learning outcome authentically.

METHOD

Setting and Subjects of the Research

The research was conducted at Elementary schools which is located in

Bangkinang Kota, namely; SDN 016 Bangkinang Kota, SDN 003 Bangkinang Kota, and SDN 018 Pahlawan Ridan Permai.

The subjects of the research are the teacher of Grade I, II, and III. The research limits on the implementation on thematic learning, the teachers' activities, and the students' activities during the learning processes. It is limited in order to obtain a comprehensive and deeper understanding on the implementation of thematic learning.

Research Approach and Method

This research employed a qualitative approach, it was chosen as the research discussed on a group of people's activities in the learning process. Bogdan and Biklen (1982:3) says that in term of Educational side, a qualitative research is also called a naturalistic research, because the research problems comes in a natural setting. Dealing with the setting of the research, it is called qualitative-naturalistic research. In qualitative-naturalistic research, the researcher is the main instrument of the research, gaining the specific information, moving on to the next step, and collecting the whole data gradually, and drawing conclusion. In line with the statement above, Creswell (2010:261) says that researcher is the key instrument, the researcher collect the data by herself through documentation, observation, and interview with the subject of the research.

The researcher decided to use the qualitative approach, the research problem is living in Educational practice, namely thematic learning. Furthermore, the researcher use qualitative-naturalistic approach in order to collect the data in form of human's

action and utterances, which is naturally happen. Meleong (2006:3) states that "qualitative research is the type of research which gained the data; oral and written from human's action and attitude".

The case study design is used in this research in order to describe the implementation of thematic learning in the learning process which is covering up the teachers' understanding on the implementation of thematic learning, thematic learning practice, and teachers' difficulties in implementing thematic learning. In this research, it focuses on the implementation on thematic learning at elementary school in Bangkinang Kota. The early grade of elementary school which implemente KTSP and Curriculum 2013 is and use thematic learning the subject of the focus of the research. The use of case study design by using qualitative approach is expected enable to describe the data of the research focus.

Research Instrument

The key instrument in this research is the researchers themselves, it means that the researcher gained the data by observing, documenting, taking field note and interviewing the respondent by themselves. Creswell (2010:261) states that the researcher is the key instrument in the qualitative approach. Human instrument underlies on the researcher's knowledge and research method. To ease the researcher in obtaining the data of the research, the researcher uses observation guide, interview guide, and documentation signals.

Technique of Data Analysis

Technique of data analysis is adapted from Miles and Huberman (cites in Sugiyono, 2012) namely: data

collection, data reduction, data display, and verification/drawing conclusion.

These four steps are known as interactive cycle. Data reduction means grouping the data based on the research focus. Data reduction is used to group or to classify the data from observation, interview, documentation, and field note.

After grouping the data (data reduction), the next step is data display. Data is displayed based on the research focus. It is used in order to help the researcher in understanding the data and in drawing the conclusion. Based on the data of the research, the researcher displays the data on the implementation of thematic learning at Elementary School in Bangkinang Kota.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The Teachers' Understanding on Thematic Learning Approach

The researcher used interview to the nine Elementary School Teachers in Bangkinang Kota. It was found that the two schools, SD N 016 Bangkinang Kota and SD 003 Bangkinang Kota, in which the teacher experience in teaching for above 25 years, the teacher were able to explain the thematic learning concept practically, not theoretically.

Further, the researcher asked the teachers' opinion on the importance of the implementation on thematic learning at Elementary School. The teachers' respond was not meet the expected goal of the thematic learning itself, in which to ease the elementary school's students to understand the learning topic holistically. The teacher states that the only reason of implementing thematic learning is curriculum demanding of Indonesia and Government Policy.

It can be concluded that,

theoretically the two teacher know the concept of the thematic learning approach. Furthermore, the teacher undoubtedly explained the importance of the implementation of thematic learning at Elementary School. It means that, the two teachers were not able to give the philosophy reason on the implementation of thematic learning.

On the contrary, the teacher of SD Pahlawan Ridan Permai, the new teacher which has teaching experience under five years were have a good understanding on thematic learning. It was found that the teacher were able to explain the concept of thematic learning approach. The teacher explained that thematic approach is the integrated learning approach which is integrates the various topic of learning holistically. Furthermore, the teachers' explanation on the importance of thematic learning approach met the theory. The teacher confirmed that thematic learning is implemented in the early grade students of elementary school (grade 1, 2, and 3).

The Teachers' Ability in Implementing Thematic Learning Approach

To obtain the data on the implementation of thematic learning, the participant observation was used. Based on the observation, it was found that:

The thematic approach which is implemented in the three Elementary Schools was not suitable with the lesson plan designed by the teacher. The learning practice was different with the activity stated in the teachers' lesson plan. The description of the thematic learning met the thematic learning principle actually, but the learning practice is not. For example, the teacher integrates the learning outcome, learning

goal, and learning activity of the two learning topics. Based on the observation, it was found that the teacher explained the learning topic separately. The teacher did not teach the learning topic integrated. It showed that the thematic learning approach did not work.

The researcher confirmed the findings to the respondent to get the teacher's explanation on it. The researcher asked the teacher on the reason of the teaching practice. The teacher confirmed that they were not believe that the learning process which is try to integrae the various learning topic are not able to cover the whole topic maximum. Besides, the teachers argue that even the learning approach is excellent, the explanation on the whole learning topic is important. The selected of interview as follows:

Researcher : it is stated on your lesson plan on the use of thematic approach, but practically is not. Why is it so?

Teacher : "Well, the lesson plan is the outcome of the Teachers' Discussion on Teacher Work Group and used as the Report to Technical Education Unit in Bangkinang Kota

Researcher : Would you please to give the detail on it?

Teacher : It means that, it is used to accomplish the administration, because we are the teacher were asked to transfer the learning topic in curriculum, not the learning process. Well, we have ever

implemented thematic approach, but it takes time. The teachers were not able to explain the learning topic completely. It affects the students' score. Majority, the students did not reach the criterion minimum standard. Then the teachers' ability was neglected. Therefore, we, the teacher ourselves turn back to the previous learning approach.

Researcher : What do you expect from the government do relate to the implementation of thematic approach?

Teacher : In relation with the implementation of thematic approach, the decision on the students' learning outcome was decided by the teachers themselves. The government is only part of the policy. As it is known that thematic approach relates the learning topic with the things surround the students. However, when the students face the national examination, they were difficult to answer the question since the national examination question get the learning topic from their own surrounding. Since

people judges us, the teacher based on the students' achievement.

The similar answer is also found by the researcher. Technical is the reason of the teacher for deciding not implementing thematic approach. Some teacher says that the students' achievement is the more important point should be considered by the teacher rather than learning process. It affects the schools' grade.

Besides, the teacher says that the less of thematic learning practice experience and training is the reason of the handicap implementation of thematic learning. Furthermore, the teachers colleagues are not possibly become a role model in implementing thematic approach.

Among the three Elementary Schools, SD 003 Bangkinang Kota is the most consistent elementary school in implementing the thematic approach. Since it is known that it was pilot project of the implementation of Curriculum 2013. It was found that in the observation, the teacher' struggle in implementing thematic approach is exist. However, the weakness is on the movement between the learning topics. The correlation between the learning topic and the sup topic is weak.

The Teachers' Difficulties in Implementing Thematic Approach

Generally, there were two factors faced by the teacher in implementing thematic approach, supporting and, the supporting factors are as follows: the availability of the learning material, the students' achievement is more important than learning process, facilities and infrastructure, the availability of teaching media, pair teacher, teacher's ability in managing the learning topic,

the headmaster policy.

Meanwhile, the are as follows, the less of time, the less of learning resources, the parents' mindset, the unwillingness of the teacher to apply thematic approach, control the students' enthusiasm, media, puppets, the variations of learning resources.

Discussion

Thematic approach is appropriate for the teaching and learning process of the early grade students at Elementary School, which is the learning is belong to displaying the concrete thing in the classroom. The students were given real experience during the learning process. Dealing with that, the teachers have to be aware on the philosophy teaching of Early Grade Elementary School students. It becomes important in order to make sure that the implementation of thematic approach is not in case of accomplishing the school administration.

Thematic approach is the integrated learning approach which comes up by the selected topic and giving meaningful learning experience to the students. The students' involvement is the main focus of the thematic approach, in order to give the real experience to the students. By having real experience the students were able to understand the learning process easily. Thematic approach emphasizes learning by doing. The teachers' creativity in designing and packaging the learning experience is a must. Besides, the real experience helps the students to get the understanding holistically, practical and theoretical.

Jean Piaget (cites in Dantes, 2008) says that every children has its own way to interpret and adapt with the environment (cognitive development

theory). Every student has its own schemata, a system which helps the children to correlate what they know and what they understand. The understanding occurs through assimilation and accommodation process. The two processes gives balancing on the students previous experience and existence experience. Dealing with the situation above, the students' learning style is influenced by the environment. It cannot be separated each other.

Here are some learning attitudes of the elementary school students as follows: (1) think objective, the movement comes reflectively, (3) using operational thinking, (4) cause and effect relationship, (5) understanding substantial concept, volume of liquid,

Regarding on the thinking development above, there are three types of the students' learning style: (1) concrete, the learning material can be seen, heard, smelled, touched, and modified, the environment explores as the main point. The exposure experience given is expected to ease the students in understanding the learning concept because of the close contact between the students and environment. (2) Integrative, the elementary school students view the learning process as an integrative part. The students are a little bit difficult to get the understanding on the each science. It is quite hard for the students while learning separately. The integrated learning is better since the students' though development is deductive, starting general thing to the specific thing. Hierarchy, the concept of learning is started by introducing the simple topic then continued to the complex topic. It is necessary to have the logical sequences between the topics of learning created by the teacher.

Dealing with the findings of the research it was found that the realization for the teacher to understand the elementary school students; development thinking is a must. It has to be inherent with the pedagogical concept which is part of the responsibility of the teacher for being owned, internalized, understood, and implemented.

Mulyasa (2013:193-193) states that teacher as designer, has responsibility in designing and planning the learning process. It is also known as Lesson Plan, which is composed based on the consideration on the need analysis, the students' characteristic, classroom characteristics, and the other supporting factors. Teacher as demonstrator, is demanded to develop and master the learning topic to enable the students achieve the learning goal.

Sharing and Pair-discussion is one of the solution to solve the teachers' difficulties in implementing thematic learning, Trianto (2011:175) states that pair discussion among the teachers contributes on:

- a) Determining the operational learning competence, b) various learning activities are selected, every teachers has its own learning experience, it is better to share the learning experience process to stimulate or to overcome another teachers' problem perhaps, and c) the easiness in preparing the teaching media, everyone works in team to help each other to create a teaching media. The teaching media might share each other.

Furthermore, Uno (2009:17) states that to be a professional teacher means the teacher should have an

awareness for having up-grading on learning theory and also learning practice, in-service training among the teachers is better.

Lastly, it is cannot be denied that the policy decided and applied by the headmaster is the main key to help the teacher implement the thematic learning in the learning process. Mulyasa (2013:106) proposed some policies that is possibly to do by the headmaster, namely:

- a). Highlighting the changes of Curriculum as an integral part among the school program, Allocating the specific budget for the availability of the teaching media and teaching material,
- c). Upgrading teachers' professionalism,
- d) the availability of the supporting school facilities and infrastructures,
- e) having a cooperation and collaboration with the related institution on the implementation of thematic learning.

Generally, the supporting given of the stakeholders, the teachers, administrator, the students' parents, and society are the key success for a good implementation of thematic learning.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the research it can be concluded that:

1. The teachers of SD o10 Bangkinang Kota, SD 003 Bangkinang Kota, SD Pahlawan have an understanding on the concept of thematic learning. Thematic learning is defined as an integrated of two or more learning topics into one topics in the learning process. Furthermore, these teachers have different opinions relates to the importance of thematic learning. The

newly teachers are able to explain the importance of the thematic learning for being implemented in the elementary school. The teachers of SD Pahlawan know more on the importance of thematic learning than the others.

2. The learning design and the learning practice do not meet each other. In the learning design, the implementation of thematic learning is drawn clearly, but it is not meet in the learning practice. The teachers' belief on their own perception that the material cannot be delivered holistically if the teacher implement thematic learning.
3. Supporting factors on the implementation of thematic learning are the availability of the learning materials, the demanding of the learning outcome is more important than the learning process, facilities and infrastructure, the availability of teaching media, pair teacher, teachers' creativity in managing the classroom, and the headmaster's policy. Meanwhile, the obstacle factors are the unwillingness of the teacher for taking their time to prepare the learning, the less of the availability of the learning materials, the parents' misconception on thematic learning, the unwillingness of some teachers for implementing thematic learning, controlling students' enthusiasm, and the effort to prepare the teaching media, teaching aids, and learning materials.

Suggestion

Here are some suggestions that are expected for being used to help the teacher is to implement the thematic learning, namely:

1. In-service training is necessary for the teacher in implementing thematic learning. The continuing support is must be given by the headmaster by given the availability of the facilities and infrastructures, the learning materials, allocating the specific budget for upgrading teachers' resources.
2. The teachers' commitment on the willingness for implementing thematic learning is seriously needed. However, a good understanding on the thematic learning should be acquired by the teachers in order to have an appropriate implementation. Besides, the teacher should pay attention on the dynamic curriculum changes. The teacher should be actively in finding out the update teaching method, and teaching strategy.
3. The government, in this case the Ministry of Education and Culture, have to think on the quality of the instructor in giving the explanation on thematic learning. A vivid selection of the instructor should be used. The selected instructors have to be a professional, and have a good capability, to ensure that the teacher training program reaches out a good quality. Besides, the continual controlling and the assisting of the teachers have to be attracted by the government. An evaluation of the training is needed.

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