

# The Competence of Primary School English Teachers in Indonesia

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## Abstract

The problem of this research is ‘what is the level of professional and pedagogic competence of English primary school teachers?’. This paper highlights the findings of a study which was undertaken at primary schools in Indonesia. The aims of the study were to explore the primary school English teachers’ competence about their professional and pedagogic competency. Test and open question were employed to obtain the data of the level of professional and pedagogic competencies. The recommendations for the improvement of professional and pedagogic competencies of primary school teachers of English were also provided.

**Keywords:** Professional competence, pedagogic competence, primary school English teachers

## 1. Introduction

Indonesia, teaching English to young learners has been implemented in some schools since 1992. The implementation of TEYL in Indonesia is not obligatory. English at elementary school is not the compulsory subject. It is the *local content* subject.

English at elementary school as the local content subject is promoted by the policy of Ministry of Education and Culture Number 0487/4/1992, Chapter VIII, which states that schools can add the basic subjects in the curriculum, as long as the lesson is not contrary to the national education goals. Then, the policy has been followed by the Decree of the Ministry of Education and Culture Number 060/U/1993 dated February 25, 1993 about the possibility of the English program as a local content in elementary school that can be started in the 4th grade.

Decentralization of education in Indonesia has encouraged local governments to make their own decisions relative to some portion of curricular space in the form of the use of some learning hours for what has become known as a local content (Musthafa 2010:1). As a result of this decentralization policy, many districts and city governments are interested in teaching English to young learners (EYL). This is evidenced by the increasing number of elementary schools which offer English classes at the elementary school level.

Currently, many elementary schools in Indonesia offer English subject as a local content starting at the fourth grade (aged nine to ten); yet many other elementary schools even teach English at earlier grades (earlier age). It becomes a new trend in which schools offer English instruction before grade four.

Language policies introduce English to young learners at earlier ages, and the educators look for the most effective ways of teaching it. Aligned with the introduction of foreign languages to young learners, the necessity to prepare teachers has risen (Vojtcova 2008:93). This TEYL program is necessary to be well prepared. Qualified and competent teachers are necessary to be prepared for the implementation of this curriculum. There is a need of training for teachers of English at elementary schools. Malkina (2008:33) asserts that in order to be qualified to teach English as a foreign language at elementary school, teachers have to attend teachers’ college or complete their university studies

Vale and Feunteun (2012: 6) classifies typical points raised by the teachers of English to children, namely 1) teachers with EYL experience, but with no experience of working with children, 2) teachers with experience of teaching children, but with little or no experience of teaching EFL, and 3) teachers who are training to teach EFL, possibly to children. In Indonesia, EYL teachers are classified into three types, namely: 1) classroom teachers who have not been to English teaching college, 2) English teachers who attend English teaching college but have no experience working with children, and 3) teachers who have English background and experience working with children (Suyanto 2009: 33).

Teachers of English to young learners need to improve their competences. The competencies that teachers of foreign languages for young learners should have are communicative competence in the foreign language, linguistic competence, linguistic-cultural competence and didactic/pedagogical competence (Pogosian 2008: 53). This article explores the Indonesian primary school English teachers’ competence. This article discusses the professional and pedagogic competence of English teachers for young learners in South Sulawesi province. The main research question addressed by their study is “what is the competence of primary school English teacher?” The test of English teacher is developed based on the teachers’ competency referring to the National Education Ministry Decree, Number 16 Year 2007 about the Standards of Teacher Academic Qualifications and Competence. This self-evaluation also includes some ideas from Richards (2010, 101) and Murray (2009, 19) about the language competency which must be met by the English teacher.

## 2. The Qualification of Primary School English Teachers

The pre-survey was conducted in several regencies such as Makassar, Bantaeng, Bulukumba, Wajo, Bone, Sidrap, Soppeng, Pangkep, Parepare, Enrekang in South Sulawesi in November 2011. The result shows that there are some serious problems. The problems are 1) there are 51% teachers of 1415 English teachers of elementary schools in ten regencies have never attended English Teacher Training College, 2) only 21% have already attended the English training, 3) 68% teachers have English teaching experience less than 5 years. The data could be seen in Table 1.

The data show that there are 1415 elementary school English teachers in ten regencies in South Sulawesi. 724 (51%) teachers have never attended to English Teacher Training College. This means that there are more than fifty percentages of teachers who teach English in elementary school have not been to English Teacher Training College.

Most of them have never attended the English training for young learners. This indicates that most of them do not have knowledge and skill in teaching English to young learners. They may not be provided with the skill and ability to create the suitable learning, to use various methods and strategies in teaching young learners, to create useful materials, to make English accessible to very young learners and to use song, story and poem in teaching young learners.

There are 957 teachers or 68 % of them are teachers who may not have enough experience in teaching English especially for young learners. English teacher to young learners should offer learners enjoyable and active roles in the learning experience help young learners develop and practice English and use multi methods and strategies in teaching.

Vale and Feunteun (1995: 6) explains that one of the typical points raised by teachers is teacher with EFL experience, but with no experience of working with children. Vale and Feunteun recommended that these teachers with no experience of working with children needed training which focuses on awareness of the needs of children, awareness of the value of child-centred activities, and awareness of the ways to integrate EFL methods to the teaching of children.

All teachers who teach English to young learners either they have or have not been to English Teaching College should understand the theories of language acquisition in general and the child second language acquisition in particular, bilingualism and the literacy skills in the early years. They should know theories of multiple intelligence, total physical response, left and right brain learning, formulaic language and work with songs and how to exploit and use of learning structures, vocabulary and facilitate pronunciation. They could connect songs, story, rhymes and poems to daily routines and transitions to learn English in class and integrate learning and playing.

**Table 1: English Teachers' Qualification**

No	Regencies	Number of Teachers	Teacher Educational Qualification				Attending Training	Teaching English in Elementary School		Teacher Status	
			S2 English	S1 English	D3 English	Non English		< = 5 year	>5 year	State Teacher	Private Teacher
1	Bone	484	-	230	8	246	58	413	71	10	474
2	Makassar	207	-	115	23	69	21	139	68	17	190
3	Sidrap	54	-	31	4	19	3	45	9	7	47
4	Enrekang	139	-	35	4	100	41	109	30	15	124
5	Wajo	121	-	13	4	104	45	66	21	5	116
6	Soppeng	81	-	8	-	73	14	69	12	10	71
7	Pangkep	89	-	16	1	72	22	19	70	12	77
8	Bantaeng	22	-	10	1	11	7	15	7	1	21
9	Bulukumba	63	-	39	-	24	-	47	16	3	60
10	Parepare	155	1	147	1	6	88	35	120	76	79
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1415</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>644</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>724</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>957</b>	<b>424</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>1259</b>
				<b>46%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>89%</b>

English teachers in elementary school need to improve their level of pedagogic and professional competence. To

improve the competence, it is important to measure the competence at first. Based on the rule of the Ministry of National Education Number 16 of 2007, four competencies must be owned by teacher: pedagogic, personal, social and professional competence. This article focuses on two competences namely professional and pedagogic competence.

### 3. Competence

A competency is an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation. Underlying characteristics means the competency is a fairly deep and enduring part of a person's personality and can predict behavior in a wide variety of situations and tasks. Causally related means that a competency causes or predicts behavior and performance. Criterion-referenced means that the competency actually predicts who does something well or poorly, as measured on a specific criterion or standard. (Spencer and Spencer 1993:9).

Houston (1972:3) writes that competence ordinarily is defined as 'adequacy for a task' or as 'possession of required knowledge, skills, and abilities'. In this broad sense, it is clear that any mode of instruction aims for competence – for development of well-qualified individuals who possess the required knowledge and skills.

English should be introduced through the appropriate activities in the world of children, for example, learning vocabulary and simple sentences about what is on their surroundings or learning while drawing a picture, singing a song, playing a game, and telling a story. If we see the reality, the students of elementary school are assigned to translate difficult phrases and to have the grammar notes with terms that are not understood.

A teacher is someone who has an ability to understand the curriculum, syllabus, method, material, evaluation etc and is able to create joyful learning activities during the lesson. Besides, teacher is required to have good skills in English which enables him/her to provide the most suitable learning materials for the learners. A teacher must have knowledge how to apply several methods and techniques to help students learn.

Suyanto in the inaugural speech (2005:1) writes on a review of the policy implementation of entering English in elementary schools. She argued (1) the policy and rationale English to Young Learners (EYL), (2) the theoretical basis of EYL program, (3) the reality in the school (4) the qualifications of EYL teachers, (5) the learning device, and (6) teacher training. Her research (2005:12) shows that many teachers do not know how to properly hold the flash cards so that all students can see clearly, how to teach singing, so in a short time (less than 10 minutes) the students are able to sing a song whose words have something to do with their learning materials, how to present an interesting story or a fairy tale using puppets to students, how to give an example or a model for speech and conduct action verbs. Most of the teachers use instructional materials by simply following the order in the book. Teachers can not select, adapt, and develop materials needed by their students. She suggested conducting training for improving English language skills, especially for elementary English teachers who do not have educational background of the English language. They should be trained especially mastery of the language, for example, the use of correct words, grammar and word choice.

Mardika (2008:3) writes that learning English in elementary schools is still conventional. In teaching, teachers rely on the lecture method. They do not use other supporting media except book. Mardika (2008:3) writes that learning English in elementary schools is still conventional. In teaching, teachers rely on the lecture method. They do not use other supporting media except book.

In the real condition, many elementary English teachers in Indonesia do not have good competency in teaching. The research result conducted by Rina Listia and Sirajuddin Kamal (2008:2-7) show that the constraints of English language teaching in elementary schools are caused by 1) the teachers have limitations of teaching materials and methods, 2) they have low capacity in understanding the habits of children in learning a foreign language, 3) they have limitations in using media, 4) they generally have a problem regarding the implementation of classroom teaching, 5) they do not have guidelines which books are worthy and meet the standards to be used as learning materials in class, and 6) their method and teaching strategies do not suit with the development of children. This research suggested that the training or workshop is needed.

### 4. Method

The survey involved a sample from one thousand four hundred and fifteen (1.415) primary school English teachers in ten districts in South Sulawesi province in Indonesia. The districts are Makassar, Bantaeng, Bulukumba, Wajo, Bone, Sidrap, Soppeng, Pangkep, Parepare and Enrekang. The reasons in choosing ten districts as a representative of South Sulawesi are 1) the geographic location and number of schools. The survey was conducted to find the data about the qualification profile of primary school English teachers.

The respondents of this research were shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: The Respondents' Composition**

No	District	The Number of Elementary English Teachers	Sample (English Teachers)
1	Bone	484	50
2	Makassar	207	30
3	Sidrap	54	10
4	Enrekang	139	20
5	Wajo	121	20
6	Soppeng	81	15
7	Pangkep	89	15
8	Bantaeng	22	10
9	Bulukumba	63	10
10	Parepare	155	20
<b>Total</b>		<b>1415</b>	<b>200</b>

Of these 1.415 primary school English teachers in ten districts, two hundreds English teachers were selected randomly to answer the test and open question. The test was carried out to measure their subject area competence. The test was conducted to measure the teachers' competency. The test covered two competencies namely pedagogic and professional competencies.

Open question also contained requiring them to write the materials that would support their primary competence. The useful of open question was the respondents can answer in detail, can qualify and clarify responses. Open question could also give an unlimited number of possible answers.

The data analysis was conducted by applying qualitative and quantitative analysis. The data as a result of test were analyzed quantitatively and the data as a result of open question were analyzed qualitatively.

The teachers' competency was analyzed in the quantitative descriptive analysis. It is based on the scale of 1-4, and then the meaning of the average was interpreted in accordance with the continuum limit of the scale with the criteria of interpretation as follows:

**Table 3: The Criteria of Interpretation for Competency**

Score	Criteria
4	Excellent
3	Good
2	Fair
1	Poor

The interpretation of quantitative data still needed to be confirmed by the findings of test result. This was necessary because the results of quantitative analysis may be supported by the results of test. The test result was analyzed by using guidance of assessment (BSNP, 2007: 26). Score 1 was given to the right answer and score 0 was given to the wrong answer. The score total was converted into scale 1 – 10 by using formula:

$$\frac{\text{Score of the right answer}}{\text{Maximum score}} \times 10$$

The obtained score was converted into four ranges of assessment from very poor to excellent (Department of National Education, 2007: 11).

poor	: 1 - 3
fair	: 4 - 6
good	: 7 - 8
excellent	: 9 - 10

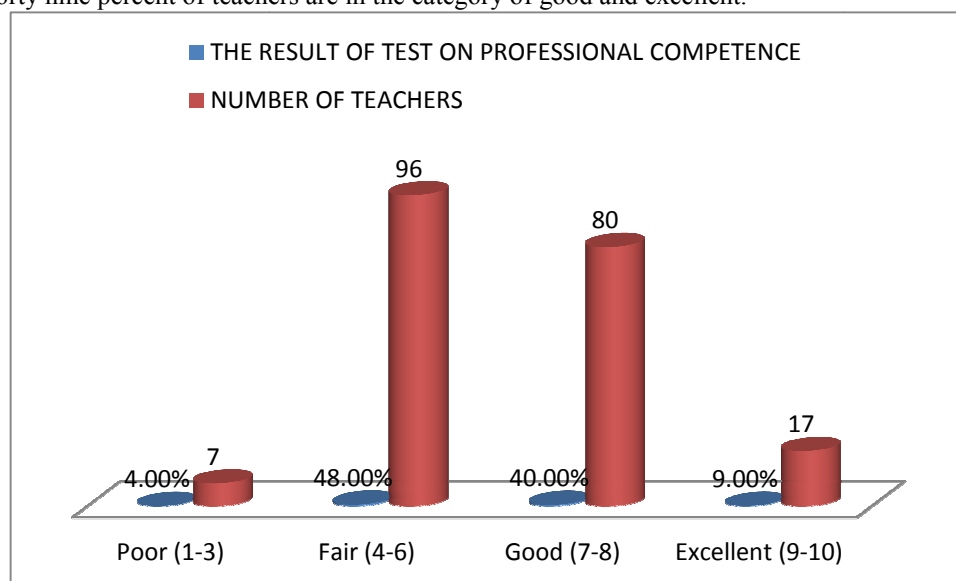
## 5. Professional Competence

Professional competence is mastering the material, concept, and the structure of language. The competencies of foreign language teachers are they have knowledge about the various aspects of language (linguistics, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic) and they master the English language spoken and written, receptive and productive in all aspects of communicative (linguistic, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic). Professional competence is also mastering the competency standard and basic competency, developing learning material, developing professionalism in sustainable reflective action, and utilizing technology information and communication to develop themselves.

**Table 4: The Result of Test on Professional Competence**

CATEGORY	THE TEST RESULT OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE
Poor (1-3)	7 Teachers (4%)
Fair (4-6)	96 Teachers (48%)
Good (7-8)	80 Teachers (40%)
Excellent (9-10)	17 Teachers (9%)
<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>200 teachers</b>

The result of test on professional competency shows that more than 50% of teachers are in the category of poor and fair. Forty nine percent of teachers are in the category of good and excellent.



**Chart 1: The Result of Test on Professional Competence**

Based on chart 1, ninety six teachers (48%) are in fair category and seven teachers (4%) are in poor category. The data also show that seventeen teachers (9%) are in excellent category and eighty teachers (40%) are in good category.

Of the result of test on teacher professional competency, in 'match the pictures to the words', many teachers do not know the difference between the shape of blouse and dress, t-shirts and shirts. In "label the pictures", many teachers are not familiar with vocabulary which is widely used in the context of everyday life such as 'mirror', 'bath tub', 'wash basin', 'book shelf'.

Many teachers did some errors in writing words such as *\*typewrite*, *\*mirro*, *\*typemecine*.

In the part of test "look at the clocks", many teachers write time, such as:

- 2:35 It's written *\*twenty five minutes past three.*
- 2:50 It's written *\*twenty minutes to three.*
- 2:25 It's written *\*five to three*
- 2:05 It's written *\*two to two*

In the part of test "read the paragraphs and answer the questions with complete sentences", many teachers did omission of "s" such as:

- \*She work in an office*
- \*She like to arrive early*
- \*She usually read newspaper*

Many teachers made mistake in using simple present tense such as:

- \*Karen does work is a receptionist in an office downtown*

In the part of open question (what material they need when they attend English language training?), it is known that the materials were most needed by teachers at the time of attending the English language training is material development, classroom language, ICT, grammar, research, competence standard and basic competency, text, vocabulary, conversation, and translation.

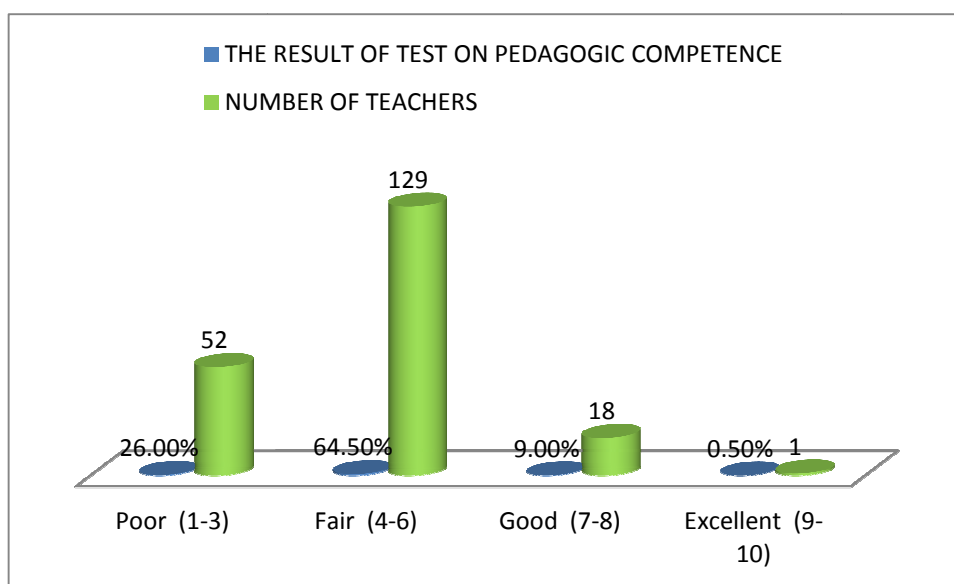
## 6. Pedagogic Competence

Pedagogic competence is mastering the learners' characteristics from the physical, moral, spiritual, social, cultural, emotional, and intellectual aspects. Pedagogic competence is mastering the theory of learning and learning principles, developing curriculum, organizing the learning, using technology, information and communication in the learning process, communicating effectively and politely to the learners, conducting assessment and process evaluation and learning result, using the result of assessment and evaluation for the sake of learners and utilizing the results of assessment and evaluation for the sake of learning and taking the reflective action to improve the quality of learning.

**Table 5: The Result of Test on Pedagogic Competence**

CATEGORY	THE RESULT OF TEST ON PEDAGOGIC COMPETENCE
Poor (1-3)	52 Teachers (26%)
Fair (4-6)	129 Teachers (64.50%)
Good (7-8)	18 Teachers (9%)
Excellent (9-10)	1 Teacher (0.5%)
<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>200 teachers</b>

The result of test on pedagogic competence shows that only 19 (9.5%) teachers are in the category of good and excellent. 181 (90.5%) teachers are in the category of fair and poor. The description can be seen in Chart 2. Based on Chart 2, fifty two teachers (26%) are in poor category, one hundred twenty nine (64.50%) are in fair category, eighteen teachers (9%) are in good category and one teacher (0.5%) is in excellent category.



**Chart 2: The Result of Test on Pedagogic Competency**

From the test results of pedagogic competency, the test items which are most frequently wrong done by teachers are the level of child development, learning theory, learning design, curriculum development, teaching English to children, assessment, teaching methods, and syllabus development.

The responses to the open question shows that they need to improve their competency. Most aspects of pedagogical competencies need improvement; they are methods of teaching English, learning models, learning theory, authentic assessment for young learners, preparation of syllabus and lesson plan, students' characteristics, motivating students, teaching grammar, teaching vocabulary, teaching listening, teaching reading, teaching speaking, teaching spelling, early childhood psychology, games, creation of matter, and instructional media.

## 7. Conclusion

The competence of English teachers in primary school in Indonesia needs improvement. Their professional and pedagogic competences need well preparing. Teachers of English to young learners need to improve their competences. The competencies that teachers of foreign languages to young learners should have are professional, pedagogic, social and personality competences.

The teaching of English to young learners in primary school is more widespread and more and more primary schools offer English in their curriculum. It must be accordance with the teachers' competence. In Indonesia, teachers of English to young learners are classified into three types, namely: 1) classroom teachers who have not been to English teaching college, 2) English teachers who attend English teaching college but have no experience working with children, and 3) teachers who have English background and experience of working with children.

The result of test on professional competency shows that more than 50% of teachers are in the category of poor and fair. The result of test on pedagogic competence shows that 181 (90.5%) teachers are in the category of poor and fair. This study uncovers that the primary school teachers of English have poor level of professional and pedagogic competences. The level is still below the intended minimum level. Therefore, this study strongly recommends the continual professional development for the teachers, especially in-service training.

The recommendations for improvement of teachers' competence are material development, classroom language, information, communication and technology (ICT), grammar, research, competence standard and basic competency, text, vocabulary, conversation, and translation, methods of teaching English, learning models, learning theory, authentic assessment to young learners, preparation of syllabus and lesson plan, students' characteristics, motivating students, teaching grammar, teaching vocabulary, teaching listening, teaching reading, teaching speaking, teaching spelling, early childhood psychology, games, creation of matter, and instructional media.

Finally, the following recommendations are hopefully useful to be taken into account namely 1) it is necessary to develop the training package to young learners; 2) for the other researcher, it is hoped to conduct research to improve and enlarge this research findings.

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