

# TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN INDONESIA: THE ROLE OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the important role of the school environments to facilitate English program in Indonesian primary schools. The school environment here refers to the environment inside the school: principal, teachers, and foreign language (FL) classroom; and outside the school: the students' parents and the school community. Researchers have investigated teaching English as foreign language (TEFL) in primary schools from different perspectives, such as curriculum, teacher's role, and materials; however, little attention is paid to examine school environment as an important factor to improve the quality of TEFL in Indonesia. The data is taken from the results of my Masters study investigating the implementation of Indonesian language as LOTE program in Kingsbury Primary School (KPS), Bundoora, Melbourne, Australia. Interviews, questionnaires, and observations were employed to obtain the answers as to why Indonesian language was selected as the LOTE program in KPS. The study found several factors supporting the program, and one of the findings relevant to this present investigation was the positive attitude given by the environments. The main reason why Indonesian language was taken as the LOTE program was because there were many Indonesian people who lived around the school and frequently involved in the school activities. This was believed by the school council as important linguistic evidence to establish the program. All the members of the school environment were very supportive. The non-LOTE teachers, for example, occasionally attended the course and watched their children learning Indonesian language. The purpose of doing that, according to the non-LOTE teachers, was to motivate their children to learn it seriously as the children also saw their teachers came and learnt it. The LOTE program was also made possible by the availability of a representative classroom which was fairly large for doing class activities. This classroom was designed especially for the LOTE program and it was completed with printed materials such as books, comics, posters, short stories, and audio visual aids to show the Indonesian family, life and culture. The principal, the LOTE teacher, and LOTE coordinator claimed that having such particular classroom was significant to build the students' motivation to practice the target language when coming into the LOTE classroom because they were immersed with the atmosphere inside the room in which they could read anything written in Indonesian language.*

**Keywords:** *language, literature, pedagogical approaches, non-native learners.*

## Introduction

The Government of the Republic of Indonesia has, over the last four decades, made many efforts to improve the quality of English teaching by, for example, producing textbook series for various types of schools, providing language laboratories, implementing in-service teacher

training programs and changing the curriculum in response to the development of theories of language and language teaching as well as of human development. In spite of this fact, the result of English teaching and learning in Indonesia is still far from the expectation. In regard to this condition, in 1990s the government de-

clares officially that English, although not compulsory, can be taught in primary schools starting from grade four if a province wishes English to be introduced as local content (Indonesia, 1994:8). This policy is taken as the response to the growing demand for English language instruction among Indonesia's population and concern about the unsatisfactory results of prevailing English instruction (Huda, 1994:83). Since then, investigations have been carried out to evaluate the success of the program. Retmono (1992) and Huda (1994), for example, find out that the program has not shown satisfactory result, this is due to several factors, for example (1) unclear objectives of instruction (curriculum); (2) unclear selection of materials; (3) unclear methods of instruction; or (4) unqualified teachers. These kinds of factors are very often considered as the major issues regarding the TEFL in a wider context in Indonesia, including in primary school, and very little attention is paid to examine the important role of classroom management. Dardiri (1994) who observes TEFL at twelve primary schools in Malang, East Java, finds that the teaching and learning facilities and media were less than expected. My personal observations to some primary schools in Malang support the result of his study, that is, those schools do not facilitate the program with a representative classroom. The TEFL program in primary school is most of the time given in the classroom with poor facilities.

#### **Environment to the program: A theoretical review**

Environment, in general sense, can be divided into two kinds, i.e. environment inside and outside the school.

#### **Environment inside the school**

Environment inside the school involves the availability of a representative room for the program and the support from the school members. What is meant by a representative room is that the pro-

gram should be facilitated with a special room in which students can have an access of various resources relevant to learning of the target language. The room is equipped with, for example, *printed materials* written in English, such as books, comics, short stories, fictions, magazines, posters; *audio visuals*, such as television with English program, the internet, and other related materials. So that, when entering the room, the students will feel that they are entering to an English atmosphere where they can feel that they are embedded with English society and its culture. Moreover when a commitment is made to speak only English in this area; for example "*English speaking zone*" it will create conducive environment for the students to practice their English.

The physical appearance of the room must be carefully considered. As trivial as it may first appear, in the face of the decisions to implement language-teaching principles in an array of clever techniques, students are indeed profoundly affected by what they see, hear, and feel when they enter the classroom. Brown (2001) suggests that (1) the classroom should be neat, clean, and orderly in appearance; (2) chalkboards are erased; (3) chairs are appropriately arranged; (4) if the room has bulletin boards and you have the freedom to use them; (5) the classroom is as free from external noises as possible (machinery outside, street noise, hallway voices, etc); (6) acoustic within your classroom are at least tolerable; and (7) heating and cooling systems (if applicable) are operating.

Brown (2001) also claims that seating arrangements is significant. Students are members of a team and should be able to see one another, to talk to one another (in English) and not be made to feel like they just walk into a military formation. If the classroom has movable desk-chairs, consider patterns of semi-circles, U-shapes, concentric circles, or—if your class size is small enough—one circle so

that students are not all squarely facing the teacher. If the room has tables with two to four students at each, try to come up with configurations that make interaction among students most feasible. Give some thought to how students will do small group and pair work with as little chaos as possible.

Chalkboard is another useful instrument for teaching. It allows you illustrate with words and pictures and graphs and charts. It is always there and it is recyclable. So take advantage of this instant visual aid. At the same time, try to be neat and orderly in your chalkboard use, erasing as often as appropriate; a messy, confusing chalkboard drives students crazy. Madya (1991) argues that for a large number of students, the classroom is perhaps the only place where they have access to English, mostly in its written form due to the fact that for various reasons teachers do not use English as a means of classroom communication. This may bring about the students' motivation.

Also, the classroom may be construed to include any electrical equipment, for example overhead projector or a video player. When a teacher decides to utilize this kind instrument, they should make sure that (1) the room has outlets; (2) the equipment fits comfortably in the room; (3) everyone can see and hear the visual and auditory system; (4) you leave enough time before and after class to get the equipment and return it to its proper place; (5) the machine actually works; (6) you know how to operate it; (7) there is an extra light bulb or battery or whatever else you will need if a routine replacement is in order (Brown, 2001).

Another significant category of environment inside the school is the support from the school members. This includes both the foreign language (FL) teacher and non-FL teachers. All the school members should have a strong commitment to achieve the success of the program. They should be aware that all courses at school are important, and

therefore, they need to create a condition in which students can learn effectively. Effective language learners, according to Commins (1992), will learn a language best if they are given favorable conditions such as (1) they are treated as individuals with their own needs and interests; (2) they are provided with opportunities to participate in communicative use of the target language in a wide range of activities; (3) they are exposed to communicative data which is comprehensible and relevant to their own needs and interests; (4) they focus deliberately on various language forms, skills, and strategies in order to support the process of language acquisition; (5) they are exposed to sociocultural data and direct experience of the culture(s) embedded within the target language; (6) they become aware of the role and nature of language and of culture; (7) they are provided with appropriate feedback about their progress; and (8) they are provided with opportunities to manage their own learning.

### **Environment outside the school**

Environment outside the school may involve the students' parents of both native and non-native speakers of the target language. In regard to this issue, Huda (1994) argues that there are three types of community environment in relation to primary English instruction in Indonesia. Each demands a different type of instructional emphasis. These three types are (1) tourism environment, such as Bali. In this region, students learn English because they have an access of direct contact with the native speakers of the target language. They learn FL because they want to practice their English with tourists; (2) industrial environments including areas with a high degree of industrial employment of the local population. In these areas, professionals need English to interact with their foreign counterparts; (3) urban environments, in these areas people living in cities use English for general purposes, like understanding reading materials, TV,

and international communication.

### Method

As mentioned earlier, the data of this paper is taken from the results of my Masters study in Melbourne, Australia. The informants for this study were (1) the principal, (2) the LOTE coordinator, (3) the Indonesian teacher, and (4) the students at Kingsbury primary school. The students taken as the population were those undertaking the Indonesian program. There were four classes participating in the Indonesian program, i.e. year 3, 4, 5, and 6. Two of these classes were taken as the sample, i.e. year 3 and 4. Questionnaires, interviews, and observations were utilized to obtain the data. The employment of multiple instruments would provide higher quality evidence, than studies relying on only a single source of information (Yin, 1994).

The questionnaires addressed to the students contained twenty-two questions. Most of the questions asked the students about their learning activities and their perceptions of Indonesian lesson in the school. Open-ended interviews were conducted with the principal, the LOTE program coordinator, and the Indonesian teacher. The interview with the principal was intended to get the data concerning the length of Indonesian instruction, the reasons for selecting Indonesian as the LOTE program in the school, the general evaluation of the Indonesian program, the school's attempts to improve the quality of the Indonesian program, and general comments about any factors which supported or hindered the Indonesian teaching. The interview with the LOTE coordinator was intended to get further data dealing with general comments about the problems, if any, encountered by the Indonesian teacher and students as well as the attempts to improve the quality of Indonesian teaching. Finally, the interview with the Indonesian teacher was intended to get the information about preparation, the teacher's practices, and a general

evaluation of the students' achievement in the Indonesian program.

Direct observations were done during the research, since the researcher made field visits to the case study site. The aim of the direct observation was to provide additional information about the topic being studied to complement the questionnaires and the interviews (Yin, 1994). Thus, the observation would describe the activities introduced by the Indonesian teacher in the classroom. Three aids were employed to obtain evidence in this observation: (a) a video-camera, to obtain pictures of the teaching and learning process, (b) a tape-recorder, to support the quality of sound system of video camera. A portable microphone attached to the tape recorder was also used and (c) time segment observation form, to identify the activities which were not necessarily recorded on either video or audio tape.

### Findings

The results of the study relevant to providing the answer to this present paper include (1) reason for choosing Indonesian as a LOTE program, (2) having supportive community: the community of the students' parents, having supportive school staff, having resources, classroom management, and (3) the Indonesian community around the school.

#### Reason for choosing Indonesian as a LOTE program

The first thing to note concerns the choice of Indonesian made by the school council as a FL to learn. The decision is taken because of the availability of Indonesian community who are living around the school environment. Most of them are Indonesian people studying at La Trobe University undertaking their Masters and Doctoral degree. They bring their families, and send their children to study at KPS, as this is the closest school for their children to study. The school council's decision is consistent with the needs of local communities where the population contains sig

-nificant numbers of families speaking languages other than English.

Learning a FL is the key to a true understanding of other culture, and that consequently the most effective way to achieve the desired harmony for both members of the community. Having local community languages in the curriculum would demonstrate respect for, and acceptance of, the speakers of those languages, both children in their school and their parents, and the local ethnic community in general. It would also promote understanding and appreciation of cultures other than one's own and the multicultural nature of Australian society, among members of the dominant culture. This condition gives benefit to the program because the parents like sharing the responsibility for organising the various aspects of school life, via the school council. The parents were willing to discuss issues and cooperate in activities. It was felt that awarding the languages of non-English speaking background families a place in the curriculum, in second-language programs, would do much to bring parents of different backgrounds together to enhance community life and cooperative endeavor. Thus, it is important to envisage all interested parties in the school community as being involved in each phase of implementation. This means children and parents, in addition to the principal, staff, and the school council, all are to be involved in the process of planning, participating, and evaluating the program. So, the importance of community acceptance and effective communication is emphasized in LOTE.

### **Having supportive community**

Doughty & Doughty (1974) argue that "community is a group of people living in geographical proximity to each other and who, through their work, or worship, or way of life, or any combination of these three, feel a sense of 'us-ness' when they compare themselves with any

other group of people." There is no doubt that in many areas where a community is very well developed, people do in fact live very close to each other in this sense. To support the LOTE program, there are two types of communities working together. They are the community of children's parents and the Indonesian community living around the school.

### **The community of the students' parents**

The students' parents were very supportive to the program. The principal admits that the support given by the students' parent is very important.

He argues that "the community activities such as the unit of work we are doing this term, you know we are doing a unit of work on it and we are having an activity day. They're important because they also gain greater community support for the program, particularly for parents who don't understand what it's all about."

The purpose of doing the unit of work and the community activity, as pointed out by the principal, was to have the community understand the program better and to tell the parents the reason for introducing Indonesian program. The activity will give understanding to some of the parents' view who believed that there should not be a LOTE taught in primary school, that the children should be spending more time learning English and Mathematics. Building up the relationship between the school and the community in this sense is essential. Doughty & Doughty (1974:62) claim that "if a community is based on shared values, then what we must look at is not the geographical distance between the child's home and the child's school, but the experiential distance between the attitudes and assumptions familiar to the child in his home and those attitudes and assumptions which he will meet in school." These

principles fit to one of the reasons why KPS selects Indonesian as the LOTE program, i.e., to ensure the smallest possible experiential distance between the school and its parental community.

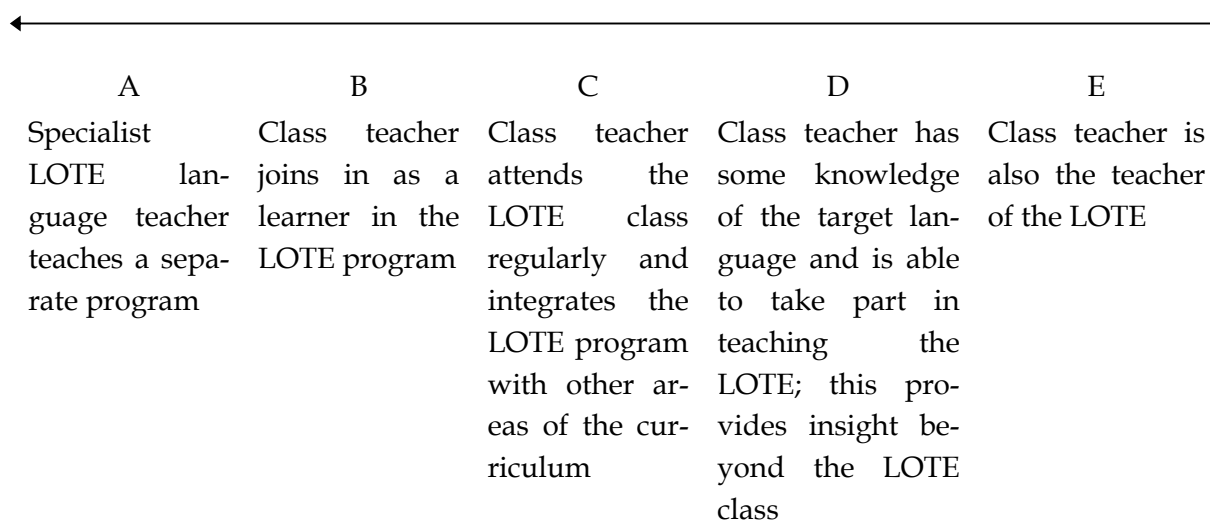
**Having supportive school staff**

Fullan (1992:82) argues that the implementation of innovation in schools is influenced by the role of principal, teacher to teacher relationships, and teacher characteristics and orientation. “As teachers, they also had to take part in the change initiated by the principals. In order to realize this, teachers needed to have relationships among others such as collegiality for communication, trust, support and help, interaction and morale, and innovative characteristics.” The results of classroom observations revealed that there has been positive cooperation between the class and the LOTE teacher at KPS. One aspect of their cooperation is reflected in the presence of the class teachers in the LOTE classroom during the lesson. The class teachers’ attendance endorses the principles of “Continuum of LOTE programs in the context of the total school curriculum” (see Chart 1 below). According to the LOTE teacher, the pres-

ence of the class teachers provides a good example for the children, because they could see that other people want to learn. Also, their presence helps a lot with the children management. It is important that the school and the whole school system supported the program. In some classes the classroom teacher will come into the class and in this instance the teacher helped manage their children and at the same time also learned Indonesian.

The acceptance of Indonesian as the LOTE program in KPS should mean a total commitment from the school. LOTE teachers, therefore, should not feel that they are working in isolation, but with the full support of the principal, staff and parents who worked with the LOTE teachers to develop, maintain and evaluate the LOTE program. The employing authorities which consist of Ethnic Authorities, the Ministry of Education, the Catholic and Independent Schools’ System as well as the Victorian School of Languages need to show their support by ensuring that schools are committed to long-term LOTE programs being maintained by professionally trained teachers who have job security and a future in teaching a LOTE (Sutton, 1993).

**Chart 1: Continuum of Program Contexts**



Thus, the LOTE program in the school was the responsibility for the educational system. Professional development for LOTE teachers to increase the quality of their teaching was also necessary if the school was serious in the continuity of the program. In-service LOTE teaching for all school staff would also help raise the status of LOTE and give other teachers insight into the advantages of learning second language.

### **Having resources**

According to the LOTE coordinator, the resources of the LOTE program were adequate, but there was still a need to buy more. The school needed more books, such as children's comics and magazines. The LOTE coordinator also pointed out that other resources were available in the school, such as video tape to display aspects of Indonesian culture: the family, schools, children, and meals. There were also many pictures and posters. In contrast, the LOTE teacher argued that she had some materials but still there were not enough Indonesian resources available. The reason was because there were not many Indonesian bookshops. She claimed that there was only one place in Victoria which provided Indonesian materials. This situation encouraged the LOTE teacher to make her own materials with the students by, for example, asking the students to get newspapers and cut the names of athletes; making rabbits from a piece of paper with the students; making colorful dices from papers, and also rewriting some Indonesian songs.

According to Edge (1993), there are four types of materials facilitating learning: (1) published materials; (2) teacher-produced materials; (3) students' materials; and (4) authentic materials. Some of the materials used by the LOTE teacher in the classroom were made by the teacher herself and the students. Edge (1993) points out that:

The most important role of teacher-produced materials is to bridge the gap

between the classroom and the world outside. The results of teacher-produced materials should be that (a) the use of the target language is related to the world outside the classroom; (b) there is authentic communication between the learners. Another important task for the teachers is to introduce what are called authentic materials into the classroom.

There are two ways of thinking about students materials: (a) learning materials produced by the students—the students are using their own knowledge and personal background to produce learning materials for their classmates and (b) students as materials—for example the classroom contains real people wearing their clothes, and this can be the basis of extended practice. We thus make sure that students are learning words that are directly relevant to their lives.

### **Classroom Management**

The term classroom management in this context is used to explain two main things: (1) a special room for FL learning, leading to a discussion of the importance of space and (2) a separate classroom particularly designed for the LOTE program; a classroom equipped with complete resources. Such ideal classroom can and will exert a powerful influence on the teaching and learning activities (Edge, 1993). This study found that many schools currently implementing LOTE program in Australia were unable to provide suitable LOTE classes. Many teachers had to travel from one room to another carrying all their resources with them. Without a particular classroom, it would be difficult to immerse the children fully in the language (Comito, 1993:44). A similar problem was also faced by the LOTE teacher at KPS in which she had to share her teaching facilities with the school library. The school had not been able to afford a separate classroom for the LOTE program due to the lack of money from the government.

The study also found that having enough space for LOTE program was important. The LOTE teacher argued that “having a display space, having a space for the children to move and having space for children to sit on the floor is very important in my classroom. I have space where we can sit in a circle and play a game in the whole room. So, space is very important. Also space to sit down, so they can work comfortably.” The other essential point which emerged as a result of having a space was the teacher’s and children’s ability to carry out activities in the classroom such as doing a workshop. Further, the LOTE teacher pointed out the importance of having space for displaying children’s work. She stated that:

“I think it’s important for children when they are learning a language to be immersed in the language, to have language all around them. This is very difficult when teaching a language in a country where it is not spoken very often. So, it’s better, I think it would be best, if I have a LOTE room, an Indonesian room, where the children come and learn Indonesian. And everywhere in the room are Indonesian things, ‘*barang-barang*’ (things), posters, words just any words like ‘*pintu*’ (door), ‘*jendela*’ (window), words like that, the children’s work as well to show that they can look at each other’s work. They can just say ...there is someone else who’s done that. If they’re looking on the wall, and they see Indonesian words they start speaking them. Because, I’ve seen that happen. They look on the wall and they start to read it, ‘*dinding*’ (wall), or they might look on the wall and they see a list of words. It could be anything and they just try to say the word. So, they’re practising you know, and they’re learning just by trying to say it. It might not be in context but they’re still having practice by saying it. So, that’s really what I think. And it’s also good to display children’s work to show that it’s worthy of being displayed to show that they produce something which is good.

And to build their self-esteem you know, and show them that people like it and people want to see it. Then the next time they’ll do good work again.”

Having enough space is significant for classroom interaction. It was obvious that the LOTE teacher very often asked the students to sit down on the floor when explaining the lesson. Sometimes, the students also used that space to do drama in which Indonesian, as the target language, was practiced. To support this space management, the type of chairs for the children should be light but strong so that the children were able to move and rearrange themselves as desired. This situation differs from what happens in most classrooms in Indonesia. The students in Indonesia usually do not have enough space in the classroom because it is fully occupied with heavy chairs which are not easy to be moved and rearranged. Moreover, the average number of students in a classroom is usually more than forty. Another issue is that the floors in Indonesian primary schools are not covered with carpet. Thus, asking them to sit down on the rough tile or concrete will potentially create health problems. For this reason, using floor for discussing the lessons, as that practiced by the LOTE teacher in KPS, is difficult to be implemented in Indonesian context.

Another issue potentially arises in Indonesian context concerns space to display students’ work. This is due to the implementation of 5K motto in almost every Indonesian primary schools. The 5K stands for ‘*Kebersihan*’ (Cleanliness), ‘*Ketertiban*’ (Orderliness), ‘*Keindahan*’ (Beauty), ‘*Keamanan*’ (Security), and ‘*Kesehatan*’ (Health). A possible problem may come up when displaying students’ work on the wall, i.e. contradicting to one of the 5K principles, that is, ‘*Kebersihan*’ (Cleanliness) motto. To solve this problem, negotiation with the general school policy, for example, asking for additional boards need to be made because

displaying items like pictures, students' projects, and self-access materials is important (Underwood, 1987).

Other important findings related to the classroom management are reinforcement and discipline. Turney et al (1983) argue that reinforcement in the classroom can have significant effects upon pupil behaviors whether the reinforcement is in the form of teacher's praise and attention, tokens, or activities that the pupils prefer to engage in. Increases in appropriate behaviors, development of new or little used positive behaviors and the elimination of inappropriate behaviors are all possible if the reinforcement procedures are carefully applied. An example of reinforcement made by the LOTE teacher was giving the students rewards, such as *bagus* (good) or *pintar* (clever) although the students' response were not completely right. Asking the students to put their hand on their head *tangan di atas kepala*, or on their mouth *tangan di atas mulut* were effective way to discipline the students. In Indonesian context, teachers usually give students very little rewards. On the other hand, based on my observations, teachers tend to be easily angry when students giving wrong answer. Furthermore, to discipline students, teachers in Indonesia like showing their authority and even some of them punish the students physically.

### **The Indonesian community around the school**

Both of the LOTE teacher and the LOTE coordinator argued that the Indonesian community had been very supportive to the program. For example, they were participating actively as members of the school committee, and coming up and playing things like '*Angklung*' (a Sundanese traditional musical instrument made from bamboo). Having Indonesian children in the classroom was also beneficial to arouse the Australian children's awareness that Indonesian was a valid language and a real thing. The school council's decision to select Indonesian as

the LOTE program in this school is precise because it is directly supported by the availability of Indonesian community around the KPS. The availability and support from the Indonesian community was advantageous in developing the program.

The involvement of the Indonesian community was so obvious when KPS held 'Indonesian Activity Day'. This activity was mounted by the school to provide students with some understandings of Indonesian culture. A number of activities were demonstrated by the whole member of the school: the principal, teacher, parents, and students. They did several things such as cooking *Nasi Goreng* and *Lumpiah* (Indonesian meals), showing the students *Wayang Golek* (a traditional puppet from West Java) and *Wayang Kulit* (a traditional puppet from Central Java), playing *Angklung* (a traditional musical instrument made from bamboo), introducing Indonesian children's songs "*Cha Cha Marica*", "*Disini Senang Disana Senang*" (Wherever is Happy). All of these activities were performed by the students with the assistance of the Indonesian community and members of the school. The aim of the Indonesian Activity Day, as the LOTE teacher argued, was "to give children an awareness of Indonesian culture, to give children experience with hands on experience of doing things related to Indonesia. Also, it is very good that we can have Indonesian people there, because a lot of children or some of the children have never met an Indonesian person. Also, to get the children maybe more enthusiastic about the language and maybe they will continue to learn Indonesian." The students really appreciated everything that was done for them. The students would have the opportunity to learn its culture and more importantly would enable them develop an understanding and an insight into a culture and group other than their own (Comito, 1993).

## Conclusion

This study has discussed the important role of the school environment in helping improve the quality of TEFL in Indonesia, especially in primary school context. Although the case being investigated in this study was based on the Australian setting and may not completely reflect the issues of TEFL in Indonesian context, it is believed that there are similar problems faced by the TEFL teachers in general sense, such as the one being examined in the present paper, i.e. the important role of a community to support the TEFL in a school. For that reason, some findings are undoubtedly significant and provide useful insights to gain better achievement of the implementation of TEFL especially in primary school context. This study concludes that supportive school environment plays extremely important role in teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia. As the results of this present study have shown, school environment may consist of environment inside the school or outside the school itself. The former includes the school principal, the LOTE teacher, and the non-LOTE teachers, whereas the latter includes the native students' parents (Indonesian) and non-native students' parents (non-native speakers of Indonesian). Another important finding concerns the availability of a representative TEFL classroom, in which the teacher and the students can have a lot of related materials to learn in that particular classroom. When coming into this classroom, the students will have a feeling of entering English zone and hopefully drives the students' motivation to at least practice their English. In learning a foreign language, the students should be maximally immersed to the environment resembling to target language. Further, in a circumstance where a school cannot afford establishing teaching materials, a teacher is highly expected to be able to create their own materials, so that a nuance of the tar-

get language and its culture can be established in the TEFL classroom.

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