



## **The Challenges of Remote Area Elementary Schools in Thematic Curriculum Implementation<sup>1</sup>**

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The thematic curriculum is defined as a learning method that integrates attitudes, skills, knowledge, learning value, and creative thinking using themes in the learning process. By implementing this curriculum, it is expected that it would bridge the school and daily-life learning experiences. The present study investigated some challenges in thematic curriculum implementation at five elementary schools in a remote area. This qualitative research utilized semi-structured interviews and classroom observation involving 20 teachers. A thematic analysis approach was used for this study. The study found that the teachers' lack of understanding of thematic curriculum and the lack of parental involvement are the main challenge of this curriculum implementation. This study suggests that providing teachers' learning environment and creating PTA meetings might maximize the potential of thematic curriculum implementation in elementary schools in remote areas.

Keywords: remote area, elementary school, thematic curriculum, teachers' learning environment, parental involvement

### **INTRODUCTION**

The change of learning paradigm from teacher-centered learning become students-centered learning in the 21st century brings about the changes in the curriculum. Davis & Shankar -Brown (2011) claim that thematic learning is an approach that is suitable for learners' development in the 21st century because it can enable teachers to provide students with challenges for them to reflect on a theme. It is also believed to be the effective strategies for contextual learning related to students' daily experiences (Chen, 2012; Min, Rashid & Nazri, 2012).

Thematic learning is blended learning that uses themes to link some subjects to provide meaningful experiences to students. The thematic learning method integrates attitudes,

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skills, knowledge, values of learning, and creative thinking by using themes in the learning process (Broadhead, 2001; Dewantara, 2020). It could give the students a full meaning as reflected in the various themes because students do not learn basic concepts partially.

Thematic learning emphasizes the involvement of students in the process of learning so that students can gain direct experience and are trained to find their knowledge learned. By using direct experience, students will understand the concepts they learn and link them to other concepts that they have already understood, and it can be said as a concept of learning by doing. The thematic curriculum provides stimulating experiences to help students make sense of the world around them (Frykholm & Glasson, 2005).

In Indonesia, thematic learning has been carried out through the new curriculum called the 2013 curriculum. Launching this curriculum is believed to be a strategic policy in preparing the students to face the challenges and demands in the future. It hopes it can direct the students to adapt themselves to the environment, changing the physical environment and social environment.

The thematic curriculum tried to improve students' practical intelligence by integrating the knowledge to the student's real-life issues. Through the thematic curriculum, the students could solve the problems they will face in their environment with the concept they already learn in the school, and it makes the learning more meaningful for them. Infusing practical intelligence into the curriculum and teaching material will make it easier to link students' daily life to academic achievement. The 2013 curriculum is considered to answer existing problems because this curriculum no longer separates the subjects but integrates subject into the theme according to the level of student ability.

Implementing the curriculum is the most crucial and sometimes the most challenging phase of the curriculum development process (Fu & Sibert, 2017). The teachers are the key to the success of curriculum implementation because their knowledge, beliefs, and perception plays a significant role in implementing the effective changes (Khuluqo et al., 2020). If the teachers can accept and implement the curriculum based on the procedure design by the government, it can make them formulate their meaning and perception of the new curriculum. Teachers who accept the change of curriculum will change their perception and improve their pedagogical practice (Park & Sung, 2013). Therefore, what teachers assumed as the goal in curriculum change is very important to the success of curriculum implementation.

Some countries have been implemented the thematic curriculum. Like in the UK, the thematic curriculum was introduced in the 1960. It had sought to break down traditional subject barriers in order to make learning more meaningful, relevant and stimulating for children. However, there are many challenges of implementation were discussed. Kneen et al., (2020) reported that the main challenge faced by UK primary teachers in implementing the thematic curriculum is teacher development. The teachers felt unconfident to teach by integrating subjects because they did not master one material (example: music). This study suggested providing more time to teachers to research to gain more resources and opportunities to understand the curriculum integration will

impact their teaching practice. It will also improve their confidence to implement the curriculum.

Furthermore, in Trinidad and Tobago, John clarified that the thematic curriculum made the planning units from the curriculum easier, and the teaching was more creative and focused. Also, it could make the students more engaged and motivated (John, 2015). However, in his research, he did not mention the challenges in thematic curriculum implementation.

Altinyelken (2010) found several challenges in thematic curriculum implementation in Uganda: overcrowded classrooms, lacking teaching and learning aids, inadequate number of textbooks, and low teacher motivation. This research was conducted in the urban area of Uganda. Another researcher from Uganda has clarified the rural area challenge in implementing a thematic curriculum. They found the main challenges of thematic curriculum implementation were lack of teacher training and preparation for implementing the curriculum (Ssentanda et al., 2019).

On their research, the Indonesian researchers investigated the implementation of the thematic curriculum using a quantitative approach to the students from 253 elementary schools in one of the cities in Central Java. Based on their study, even the quantitative data expressed that the implementation of the thematic curriculum is great. Still, the student's learning activity is less optimal due to the prevailing conventional teacher-centered method. In the teaching-learning practice, they still found in the teachers' active role instead of the students. Lack of supporting facilities and infrastructure still become the challenges in implementing this curriculum (Chumdari et al., 2018). These challenges were based on interviews with two teachers in that city. According to the limitation of the interview participants, these challenges could not become the tendency of implementation based on teachers' perception.

However, other researchers investigated the teachers' difficulties in implementing the thematic curriculum by using focus group discussion (FGD) to 15 elementary school teachers from eight provinces in Indonesia (Retnawati et al., 2017). They found teachers' understanding, learning implementation, learning facilities, and assessment are the challenges in thematic curriculum implementation. Unfortunately, they did not mention which province the teachers belong to, either in rural/ remote areas or urban areas. And what kind of challenges of curriculum implementation in practice did not mention clearly because this study using the FGD method without seeing the actual practice in the classroom. This research will investigate the challenges of thematic curriculum implementation focusing on remote area elementary schools in Indonesia. The researcher believes there will be unique factors of thematic curriculum implementation in a remote area.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Field Information**

This research utilized the qualitative research using the case-study in one of the remote areas in Indonesia, named Sabu Raijua regency. The remote area is known by isolation

and long distances between places (Malhoit, 2005). Sabu Raijua is a newly developed regency in East Nusa Tenggara province. The distance between this regency to Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, is 2,502 km. This regency is one of the frontiers, outermost, and left behind regency in Indonesia (or in Bahasa it is called *daerah 3T*).

Sabu Raijua is one of the districts in East Nusa Tenggara (the 3rd poorest province in Indonesia), and it is the 2nd poorest regency in East Nusa Tenggara. Monthly income of Sabu Raijua is 368.187 rupiah (\$ 25) or 16.735 rupiah (\$ 1) per day (Statistics of Kupang Regency, 2019). There are 28.88 thousand people, or 30.83 percent of the population, who lived under the poverty line. The high poverty rate is one of the major problems faced by Sabu Raijua.

### **Research Participants**

The participants in this study were 20 teachers from 5 elementary schools in Sabu Raijua. The table below will show the schools' basic information.

Table 1  
School's basic information

School Name	Status	Students	Teachers	District
School A	Public School	370	19	West-Sabu
School B	Private School	148	9	West-Sabu
School C	Public School	147	9	West-Sabu
School D	Public School	187	9	Hawu Mehara
School E	Public School	130	12	West-Sabu

Participants in this study were selected use convenience sampling base on the teacher's willingness to be interviewed and observed by the researcher. The researcher made the code to name the teachers who were participants in this study. For example, the first teacher from school A is written as TA1, the third teacher from school C is written as TC3, etc. The table below will show participants' demographics.

Table 2  
Participants' demographics

Teacher Code	Gender	Age	Employment Status	Teaching Experience	Education Background	
School A	TA1	F	28	Contract teacher	9	Bachelor
	TA2	F	49	Civil servant	10	Bachelor
	TA3	F	42	Civil servant	6	Bachelor
	TA4	F	35	Civil servant	10	Bachelor
School B	TB1	F	36	Civil servant	15	Bachelor
	TB2	F	34	Civil servant	10	Bachelor
	TB3	F	45	Civil servant	13	Bachelor
	TB4	M	42	Civil servant	17	Bachelor
School C	TC1	F	35	Civil servant	9	Bachelor
	TC2	F	49	Civil servant	12	Bachelor
	TC3	F	41	Civil servant	6	High school
	TC4	F	42	Civil servant	10	Bachelor
School D	TD1	F	52	Civil servant	26	Bachelor
	TD2	F	51	Civil servant	6	Bachelor
	TD3	F	39	Civil servant	6	Bachelor
	TD4	F	35	Civil servant	7	Bachelor
School E	TE1	F	36	Civil servant	9	Bachelor
	TE2	F	48	Civil servant	17	Bachelor
	TE3	F	12	Civil servant	3	Bachelor
	TE4	M	53	Civil servant	12	Bachelor

In this regency, there are more senior teachers than junior teachers. The senior teachers here are indigenous people who have graduated from high school and were appointed to teach in elementary schools. Some of them were immediately assigned as civil servant teachers, and others started their careers as contract teachers for several years, then were appointed as civil servants. Sabu Raijua could not have teachers' regeneration because of the high number of senior teachers, and they must complete their tenure (until 60 years old) to be retired.

Almost all teachers in this regency have obtained a bachelor's degree. The reason is, in 2005, the government made a policy whereby teachers must at least have a bachelor's degree to equalize the quality of education in Indonesia. Previously, it was difficult for teachers to get this degree because there was no university in their area, and they had to go to the capital city, Kupang. They feel difficult to leave students and their families on this island. Then the Open University established to answer these problems; teachers can study to get a bachelor's degree without leaving Sabu Island.

### Data Collection

The data collection took one month for interview and observation. The researcher used the semi-structured interview to examine the challenges of thematic curriculum implementation in remote area schools. The researcher asked some questions: how the teachers describe the thematic curriculum; how the students respond to the new

curriculum; what kind of program is held by the government for preparing the curriculum implementation; and how much the teachers are involved in the government's program.

Table 3  
Data collection

Data Collection	Duration	Transcript	Record
Semi-Structure Interview	45-60 minutes	Yes	Yes
Classroom Observation	45-60 minutes	Yes	Yes

The classroom observation was conducted during the pandemic. For one class it was only for 45-60 minutes because the maximum of students can learn in the school for only 120 minutes or 2 hours. Most of the classroom was only filled by 18-20 students due to the distribution of shifts learning during the pandemic.

### **Data Analysis**

The data in this study were analysed through the reading and review of data (observation notes and interview transcripts) to detect themes that emerge. A thematic analysis approach (Willig & Rogers, 2017) was adopted in this study. The researcher summarized and explained the result by describing the significant themes that was emerged from the analysis. The researcher discussed and categorized the findings into key themes those are closely related to the research objectives. Interpretation is also involved in discussing showing how the results from this study was related to the previous study.

### **FINDINGS**

Based on the research findings, three factors became the challenges of thematic curriculum implementation in this regency, namely the education system and students' environment factors. These factors were found by analyzing the interview and observation data.

#### **Insufficient Learning Material**

In the 2013 curriculum, the government published two types of textbooks used as a guideline in the teaching and learning process. First, the teachers' book, arranged as a guide for using the students' textbooks. It contains the materials arranged to make it easier for teachers to carry out thematic learning, such as describing the themes, learning scopes, learning objectives, media and learning tools, assessment techniques, and the instructions for using the student's book. Teachers are not expected to use this book as this is the only guidebook that became the references in the teaching and learning process. They have the flexibility to build their own learning activities according to the conditions and needs of the students. Each homeroom teacher is given with the books according to the number of themes studied in the one grade class. One book contains 150-200 pages. Teachers can get these books for free because it is paid through School Operational Grants from the government or downloaded on the Book Curriculum Centre website.

The second book is a students' book. This book contains activity-based learning plans. In this book, the learning sequence is designed with the activities that students must do with the teachers and classmates to achieve the desired competencies. The students can use the book to read, fill in, or memorize it and practice the activity materials listed independently or in groups. Like the teachers' book, the number of students' books corresponds to the number of themes studied in one grade level. These books are students' rights that can be obtained free of charge using the School Operational Grants. The students' book contains approximately 150-200 pages for each theme. As mentioned above, the implementation of the thematic curriculum in this regency was late. During the implementation, the teachers and students have not got the books yet.

*I do not know it is true or not. We, as the teachers, have to rack our brains to think about what to do. How do we have to teach our students thematically but using subject textbooks? We were confused; students were also more confused with their learning. We tried to download the guidebook on the internet, but sometimes the internet connection does not work. (TE4)*

As TE4 mentioned, the textbook is one of the primary learning materials for teachers from remote area. Based on the observation, the researcher realized that teachers were always using the textbook to teach or give the students assignment. They got depended on the textbook because they faced difficulty finding other learning material from the internet. The researcher could imagine how the teachers struggled when they did not have the 2013 curriculum textbook and used the 2006 curriculum textbook. They needed to integrate the subjects (in 2006 curriculum) to become a theme (in 2013 curriculum).

Based on the observation, the researcher found that the teacher asked their students to write the questions from the textbook to their notebook. The researcher was asking the teacher, "why they need to do it?" The teacher answered, "because the students will not bring the books to their home." Based on the regulation, the books are the students' right, but in some schools in this regency, the students could not bring the books to their home, and it will be collected to their teacher. The school will use the books again for next year's students. The students' book contains some pictures to make students easily understand the material and make it attractive to them.

Teachers need the new curriculum textbook guideline because of curriculum changes, new content, and new teaching methods (Johnston, 2016). By utilizing the textbook, it might improve their understanding of the new curriculum. The book distribution was late maybe because of the difficulty of reaching the remote area. It becomes one of the remote area challenges in implementation of the curriculum. The government needs be concerned about the textbook distribution to the remote area to implement curriculum equal in all areas in Indonesia.

However, there are many examples in the learning material contained in the textbook that remote area students cannot imagine because they have never seen it in their environment.

*The textbook is published in Jakarta, a big city, the material contains a lot of events or objects in the big city that not found in this island. When we explain it to the remote area students it becomes difficult. For example, they do not know what shape a train looks like. So, it is a bit difficult for us to teach them. We have to find a way to let our students understand what we're talking about. (TD2)*

School D is one of the schools that is difficult to reach by researchers. This school has students who are below the poverty line. Many students come to school without wearing shoes or sandals and even without showering because of water shortages. From the observation data, it was found that many children in this school did not understand Indonesian language, so the teacher had to translate it into local languages. From the explanation of the TD2 teacher, it found that this teacher had difficulty making children understand the material she wanted to teach. This teacher finally looked for a way to give students an idea of what the train would look like by asking the school staff to help download a picture of the train, print the image, and show it in front of the class.

### **Teachers' Training**

This study found that the teacher training process regarding the 2013 curriculum was only carried out several times (1 to 2 times) in this remote area. Selected national instructors carried out the training.

*We, who usually teach using subjects, now shifted using the themes and integrating the subjects into themes. But what kind of learning process or assessment, I did not know for sure. I was groping and waiting for the government to provide the training to explain that thematic curriculum. (TC2)*

Based on the explanation, they implemented the curriculum without having a deep understanding of the curriculum itself. They know about the fundamental knowledge about the thematic curriculum by changing the learning process from the subject to the themes and integrates the subjects become themes. Teachers' lack of understanding of the 2013 curriculum becomes a serious problem in implementing the curriculum itself. Teachers are the key people who interpret the curriculum and give life to it in the language classroom utilizing their instructional and evaluation strategies. Teachers' lack of understanding could influence the way they teach, the way they assess their students also the way they conduct the teaching and learning process (Darsih, 2017).

Lack of understanding about the curriculum makes the remote area teachers dependent on the government to held training. They were believed the training could make them learn and understand the new curriculum. But unfortunately, they still found difficulty in understanding the curriculum after they joined the training.

*They (the government) explained the curriculum briefly. I still find this curriculum challenging to implement. I want to search more about this curriculum on the internet, but I do not understand using IT. (TB2)*

Teachers felt the training was lack because it was briefly explained. Teachers need more deeply and detailed explanations about the curriculum to improve their understanding. Limited resources also become another problem for them. The teachers have limited

access to the internet to learn about the curriculum: first, because of their lack of ability to use IT; second, the lack of internet connection in this regency. Training became the primary option for them to learn and improve their understanding of the curriculum. But they found the training was held only for formality program.

*For them (the government), the important thing is the training has been held, only as a formality. Teachers understand it or not; they did not care about it. (TA4)*

This negative expression from the teachers could make the researcher understand how the teachers felt about the training. After the training, the government did not evaluate the teachers whether they understand the training material or not. There was no follow-up after the training. Furthermore, one teacher expressed his feeling when he joined the training.

*This training only explains the theory without looking at teachers' daily practices in the curriculum implementation. I hope the future training will be better. (TE4)*

Although TB4 said the training was only explaining the theory matters without looking for the teachers' practice in their classroom. The teachers had expectations to solve the teaching problems by sharing the opinions with other teachers or the trainers. Unfortunately, sometimes the trainers cannot answer the teachers' questions or solve the problems. Trainers' or facilitators' qualification matters could also be the challenges in the curriculum implementation.

*When I joined the training, I was confused about the assessment process in the 2013 curriculum. I asked the trainer about it, but he answered it improperly and still did not understand. (TC1)*

The curriculum implementation process should be carried out in 4 stages. From book procurement, teacher training, mentoring, also monitoring and evaluation. Unfortunately, in this regency, only two stages (book procurement and teacher training) are running; even then, there are still many shortcomings. Meanwhile, the last two stages (mentoring, monitoring and evaluation) did not hold in Sabu Raijua. There were no teachers who are assisted as mentor teachers in this regency. The teachers also did not get any mentoring for their teaching practices. Teachers do not have the opportunity to conduct the lesson assessed by the evaluation and monitoring team. It makes teachers feel confused about whether their teaching practice is correct or wrong. They are only armed with the knowledge they received from the training, even though it is still lacking.

### **Gaps with Daily Life**

The 2013 curriculum presents subject matter that cannot separate from students' daily life because learning uses a scientific approach so that lessons that have been obtained at school will be successful if they can be applied at home. The student environment factor is one of the factors in thematic curriculum implementation. The students will look at their environment and integrate it with the lesson they learn.

On the other hand, one of the aims of the 2013 curriculum is to make the parents play a direct role in teaching many things to children without deviating from what the children

already get at school. This new curriculum needs the partnership between school and parents because it could make the students realize that people who take care of them in both environments invest and coordinate time and resources to help them succeed (Olibie, 2014). Effective curriculum implementation requires the involvement of the parents, such as giving their children motivation to study. This study found four challenges of remote area students' environment in thematic curriculum implementation: geography condition, parents' economic status, students' nutrition, and parents' motivation.

As mentioned before in the methodology part, the major problem in Sabu Raijua is the high poverty rate. Based on the teachers' explanation, parents' economic status could affect the implementation of the thematic curriculum. Thematic curriculum textbook provides some activity to make the students can make an experience. However, when the teacher wanted to experiment, it is constrained by the availability of tools and materials.

*I tried to make the class more fun by doing experimental activities as described in the textbook. I asked students to bring tools and materials. The next day, some students didn't bring it with the excuse that their parents didn't buy it for them. "Mama said there was no money", they said. Eventually, I had to turn individual experiments into group experiments to keep it going. (TE4)*

There is an activity entitled "Let's Be Creative" (in Bahasa Ayo *Berkreasi*), which can facilitate students to do simple experiments in their learning. TE4 tried to carry out activities to make a windmill for the "The Changes of Energy" theme (3rd-grade, theme 6). By making a windmill, it is intended that students can see the wind and do not have to use electricity. Students can also observe whose windmill rotates faster and whether the size of origami affects the speed of rotation of the windmill. The students will measure the large of origami paper and count the number of times a windmill rotates in a minute. the After that, students are expected to explain their findings in front of the class. This activity integrates Mathematics, Science, Language and Arts subjects.

In this activity, several tools and materials must be prepared by students, such as origami paper, glue, thick plastic straws, scissors, flannelette, tacks, and rulers. The teacher asks students to bring these tools and materials to the school. Some parents find it difficult to support the provision of learning materials due to their economic factors. Some tools and materials are also hard to find on this island, and if any, the price will be more expensive. TE4 replaced this individual experiment with a group experiment to make all students joined the experiment as the solution.

Not only about the learning material but also the difficulty to study at home faced by some students because they need to work after school. In this regency, 65.87% of the population work in agriculture (Statistics of Kupang Regency, 2019), including some parents. After school, the students need to help their parents to work.

*The students have been asked to work by their parents after school. Like slice the palm tree, take care of the livestock or do farming. It is good, students have learned to make a living since childhood, but children do not have time to study. Their*

*parents did not even tell them to study or limit their working time because they need their children's help. (TD4)*

From TD4's explanation, students became a workforce after school. The school ended at 12 A.M.; they need to walk around 1 hour to reach home and have lunch. Then they rest around 1 hour after that they started to work until 6 P.M. During the observation, the researcher was going to one of the student's houses. He (6th-grade student) had just finished bringing the buffalo to the stable around 6 P.M. After that, he came to the house and rest. Some homes there do not have electricity and 6 P.M. there already dark. He rested and had dinner then sleep, without study. The students did not have time to study because of helping the parents to work. However, the parents also did not ask him to study because they did not have electricity, and it is hard to study in the dark.

Through the thematic curriculum, the students learn to connect knowledge and their lives, explore ideas, compare and evaluate viewpoints, apply knowledge and even create new ideas. It means to learn using the thematic curriculum needs more time comparing to the traditional curriculum. It would be nice if the parents could give more time for their children to study.

In this regency, the parents' awareness of sending their children to Elementary School level is relatively high. The elementary school participation rate reaches 100%. But it is still not enough; based on statistical data, the average years of schooling in this regency in 2017 and 2018 were six years. It means the parents send their children until the elementary school level and do not continue to the next level. Meanwhile, the compulsory education policy in Indonesia enforces nine years of schooling, and all are free. This situation can figure the low motivation of study given by the parents to their children.

However, based on previous explanations, we can see the low of parent's motivation in order to motivate their children in their learning. Some parents in this regency make their children work until dark and do not ask them to study at home. The mindset of parents is that students learn enough at school. This opinion was in line with one of the teachers' expressions.

*For them (the parents), send their children to school is enough. They thought the children have enough time to study at school, but they do not know what happen with their children at the school. (TD1)*

The parents seem to give up their responsibility in terms of children's education and leave it completely to the teachers at school and demand the results. In fact, the school only provides good concepts to children that should be applied at home with parental guidance. The parents' work is often used as an excuse to decide on their responsibilities in terms of educating children.

## **DISCUSSION**

Nowadays, entering the 21st century, the demands on a real-life situation have turned more complex. Education is required to prepare the students to adapt to real-life situations by designing an appropriate curriculum. Curriculum integration was believed

as an effective way to teach in the 21st century because it identifies creativity, critical, and high order thinking as important benefits of interdisciplinary activities. It is also effective for academic learning (Drake & Reid, 2020). Students who experienced integrated approaches do as well as, or better than, students in a traditional classroom for academic success. The Indonesian government started implementing curriculum integration by using a thematic approach to all elementary schools in Indonesia. They hoped by implementing this thematic curriculum will make the students adapt to the changes that occur in the environment or social life in the future.

But the question is whether this thematic curriculum suits or fits to be applied to remote area schools? As we mentioned, remote area is far away from cities and isolated; they are undeveloped compared to urban areas. Remote area students did not face significant development and social change in their community, which making them difficult to understand the meaning of thematic learning. The teachers also argue the students did not need to adapt to the 21st century because they did not feel any changes in this remote area. They said to make the remote area students memorize the learning material to move up to the next level was already difficult. This negative perception from the teachers becomes the challenge of thematic curriculum implementation in this remote area. The teacher plays the central role in the curriculum implementation; their perception and understanding will affect the curriculum implementation practice. Kon Chon-Min et al. (2012) affirmed a significant correlation between teachers' understanding of the thematic approach and their teaching practice.

This study found remote area teachers' lack of understanding become the main problem of thematic curriculum implementation. Besides, this study found some obstacles that support the teachers' lack of understanding about thematic curriculum, such as the delay of guidelines textbook distribution. The teachers were pushed to implement this curriculum without understanding it clearly. The lack of curriculum understanding could impact teaching-learning practice in the classroom and teachers' use of curriculum materials or guidelines (Choppin, 2011). In some parts, the remote area teachers feel the difficulty explaining the content to the students because the situation did not happen in this regency. Alternatively, the teacher can minimize or change the explanation that can be imagined by the elementary students in this remote area.

In line with Kann (1991), learning and teaching in the school should be taken from the student's life experience and geographical environment to make them easily understand and believe what they learn is meaningful for their lives. The main aim of the thematic curriculum is to create meaningful learning for the students, but if they could not link what they learn and their daily life, it will not achieve the curriculum aim. If the thematic curriculum wants to be applied in remote areas, it would be better if the guideline books contain more localized material to make the teachers and students understand and interpret it their everyday life experience.

Not only curriculum guidelines but also teacher training was become the main resources to improve teachers' understanding of the curriculum. Previous researchers believed that professional development affected the curriculum implementation because it could enhance teachers' knowledge and practice (Garet et al., 2001). Before and during the

curriculum implementation, the government needs to provide professional development to explain the curriculum and evaluate how teachers practice during the curriculum implementation. In this remote area before the curriculum implementation, the government held the training for the teachers to explain the curriculum. Remote area teachers were hopes that the training could make they understand about the curriculum because they feel the difficulty in access the curriculum material using the internet. However, remote area teachers have few opportunities in joining professional development because of their location (Stokes et al., 1999; Adams, 2012). Also, the training provides to the remote area teachers is not sufficient for teachers to understand this curriculum.

The participants in this study said the training material provided was very dense with a very short time, some of material was missed or explained at a glance. According to J.L Brown (2004), professional development should have a longer duration and period to make the teachers integrate their new knowledge into practice. Giving the teachers more time in their professional development could link what they learn and improve their knowledge or solve their teaching-learning practice. The teachers need professional development that is interactive with their teaching practice, such as allowing for multiple cycles of presentation and assimilation of and reflection on knowledge (Kubitskey, 2006). However, what was happened in this remote area is very contrary to the previous statement because the teachers' professional development was one-way learning and only discussed the curriculum theory without looking at the problems that occurred in the teaching practice.

Previous researchers who investigated teachers' professional development in the rural or remote area were stated that provide more collaboration learning, or teacher study group is more valuable for remote area situation (Barrett et al., 2015; Glover et al., 2016; Peltola et al., 2017; Tytler, Symington et al., 2011). Providing teacher collaboration is particularly successful in promoting curriculum implementation. Participating as a group in professional development can focus on collegial interactions and motivate working through problems of curriculum implementation together (Ghunu et al., 2019).

Through this collaboration, teachers could experience how the practical intelligence and meaningful learning on their professional development before transferring it to their teaching practice and give the meaningful learning to students. Also, teacher could manage the learning material that relatable, easily understand, and more meaningful for the students by considering remote area situation and their students understanding capabilities (Barrett et al., 2015; Glover et al., 2016; Peltola et al., 2017). And if remote area teachers could do it, it will achieve the thematic curriculum goal to make the students learning meaningful.

The finding showed the second main challenge in the thematic curriculum implementation in a remote area can be seen by the gaps between the curriculum and daily life situation. First is the economic development. Some parents have the difficulty in provide a copy material for students to study in their home. Also, it makes the parents did not know in students' textbook there are some parents-student activities that should be done together.

Thematic curriculum needs the parental involvement in their learning (Sylaj, 2021). Parents and teachers need to collaborate to make the students could have a meaningful learning and make them think what they learn in the school is useful for their daily life. In the student book, there are several activities that students and their families need to do, such as breakfast together. This book also explains the importance of having breakfast before going to school. Unfortunately, most of the students in this regency are not provided breakfast by their parents. Meanwhile, a worksheet asks students to write down and explain about breakfast activities with their families. This worksheet can make the students realize that they should eat breakfast and they will connect it with their daily life.

Based on research findings, parents' economic status also makes the students did not have time to study at home because they have to work to help their parents at home after school, e.g., looking after cows. It is actually the good practice for the students for implement what they learn in the school with their daily activity. At the 3rd grade, the students learn about the important of plants and animal for their life in the thematic curriculum. If the parents understand well about what the children learn in school, they could explain again the advantages of doing farming and raising livestock. It could make the student have deep understanding about their learning, make the learning more meaningful and improve their practical intelligence.

In addition, the thematic curriculum is student-centred learning (de Carvalho, 2014) where several activities require students to experiment. In this study, it was found that the lack of parental participation in providing learning materials for children's learning activities at school due to their economic condition. Besides that, the availability of tools and materials also becomes a challenge on this island. Remote area teachers can replace their experiment with tools and materials that easier to find in their environment. Also, it is much better if it does not cost a lot to make the parents can provide the learning materials.

The parents also need to decrease their children's working time to make them study at home. As mentioned before, times is one of the biggest factors in the successful implementation of thematic curriculum (Murdoch & Hornsby, 1997). Giving the students more time can facilitate them into deep and compelling understanding by connecting what they learn in the school and their daily lives. In the thematic curriculum book, several activities should be done together with the parents. By giving the students more time to study at home and nurture them, they might be motivated to study and have meaningful learning. For example, in the worksheet, the students need to write down their activities while helping the parents. The teacher can check the worksheet at the school. Parents can become a bridge between the school and home environments. The students more motivated and improve their learning if their view parents as models and trusted partners in learning (Adunyarittigun, 1997).

Communication between the school and parents is very important (Sylaj, 2021) and can be the way to improve this remote area challenges. Parents should engage themselves in giving such other examples to their children about school related topic (Ghazi et al., 2010). But before that, the parents need to be provided with adequate and

understandable information about activities to improve the implementation thematic curriculum. By providing PTA (parents-teacher meetings), the teachers and the parents could set the same mindset and goal to help the students improve their learning. The schools need to prepare the parents to be involved in the curriculum reform and help their children in their home learning activities. A collaboration between teachers and parents could increase children's enthusiasm for learning because they think both teachers and parents support them.

### CONCLUSION

Theoretically, the thematic curriculum can become the answer to the problems and shortcomings of the previous curriculum. The students can connect their learning and daily life to develop a much deeper and broader level of understanding than traditional learning. The thematic curriculum makes the students become the center of their learning and have meaningful learning. It can improve their critical thinking, explore their ideas, compare and evaluate viewpoints, apply knowledge, and even create new ideas. The thematic curriculum' aims can be achieved if the preparation and implementation stages are carried out correctly. By paying more attention to localized material, more mature teacher preparation, evaluation of curriculum implementation, and teachers-parents collaboration might maximize the potential of thematic curriculum in remote area.

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