

A PORTRAIT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BY NON-ENGLISH MAJOR TEACHERS

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis pengajaran Bahasa Inggris di sekolah dasar mempunyai peran penting dalam membentuk keterampilan bahasa di usia dini. Namun, ada kasus di mana sekolah tidak memiliki guru bahasa Inggris, dan guru kelas harus terpaksa mengajar bahasa Inggris. Oleh karena itu, studi ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui pengajaran dan pembelajaran di salah satu sekolah dasar yang tidak memiliki guru bahasa Inggris. Studi ini mengeksplorasi strategi untuk meningkatkan pengembangan profesional mereka dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris. Melalui pendekatan penelitian kualitatif, termasuk kuesioner dan diskusi kelompok fokus (FGD). Temuan ini menggaris bawahi sebagian besar guru yang lulus dari PGSD mengkonfirmasi bahwa mereka menghadapi kesulitan menggunakan bahasa Inggris sebagai sarana komunikasi di kelas. Selain itu, mereka juga kesulitan dalam hal tata bahasa dan kosa kata. Selain itu, didapati juga kemampuan bahwa mendengarkan sebagai keterampilan reseptif jarang diajarkan, seperti halnya kegiatan berbicara. Para peserta berbagi bahwa tata bahasa sebagian besar diajarkan, meskipun mereka menyebutkan bahwa mereka memiliki kesulitan dengan itu. Implikasi dari penelitian ini meliputi desain kurikulum, praktik pedagogis, dan rekomendasi kebijakan yang bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan bahasa Inggris untuk siswa muda dalam berbagai pengaturan pendidikan.

Kata Kunci: Pembelajar Bahasa, Bahasa Inggris, Sekolah Dasar.

ABSTRACT

This research analyzes Teaching English in elementary schools plays a pivotal role in shaping the language skills of young learners. Unfortunately, it is a common case that in Indonesia that a school doesn't have English teachers, and homeroom teachers have to teach English. Therefore, this study delves into investigating the teaching and learning in one of the elementary schools that has no English teachers. In addition, it strived to seek out the challenges faced by non-English major teachers in the school under study as well as portray their English teaching practice. Further, this study explored strategies to improve their professional development in English language instruction. Through a qualitative research approach, including questionnaires and focus group discussions (FGD), The findings highlighted mostly the teachers who graduated from PGSD confirmed that they faced difficulty using English as a means of classroom communication. Additionally, it was found that listening as a receptive skill is neglected, as are communicative activities. The participants shared that grammar was mostly taught, although they mentioned they had difficulty with it. The implications of this research extend to curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the quality of English language education for young learners in diverse educational settings.

Keywords: Elementary School, English, Young Learners.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education, Culture, and Research has announced that English in Elementary is mandated as one of the primary subjects in the Merdeka curriculum after it was abolished from the previous curriculum, the 2013 curriculum. In the 21st century, ELT in elementary has become more pivotal than before. Two undeniable factors that make it mandatory to teach them English are the increasing globalization and interconnectedness of the world. In that case, being proficient in English has become a prime skill for young learners to face and compete in the globalized world (Faridah, 2021; Meisani et al., 2020). Besides, ELT in elementary schools plays a crucial role in equipping students with the necessary language skills to communicate effectively and confidently in English.

There are many benefits to introducing and teaching English to young learners. Research has shown that young learners are equipped with a natural ability to pick up new languages quickly and easily (Chang, 2024; Luh et al., 2012; Sun, 2023). On account of that, students have the potential to develop a strong foundation in English that will advance them throughout their academic and professional careers. In terms of academic performance, some research shows that students who are proficient in English tend to perform better in other subjects as they are able to access a wider range of resources and information in English (Hessel & Strand, 2023; Martirosyan et al., 2015).

Nowadays, more people are aware that English could ensure and connect them globally since it is an international language of business, science, and technology. As stated earlier, equipping them with strong English skills in elementary school makes sure that they are well-prepared to compete in the global job market. Furthermore, ELT in

elementary schools could promote students' interest and curiosity about different cultures. That's not only enhancing students' cultural awareness but also aiding them in preparing for living and working in a multicultural society. As we continue to navigate the complexities of the modern world, it is more important than ever to ensure that students are equipped with the necessary language skills to thrive in the 21st century (Singh Malik, 2018).

According to Cameron (2001) teaching English in early age is likely different from teaching adolescents and adults. Young learners, students from age 7, or below, to 12 years old, are very active learners, they hardly want to sit and listen, and they get bored easily. Also, their focus span is not much, they can only last for an hour max, and it is the best young learners can do. Therefore, selecting activities is a crucial decision due to the young learners' characteristics to motivate and engage in effective teaching and learning process and attain learning objectives.

Due to that fact, it is suggested to create interesting, fun, and enjoyable activities for young learners to avoid students' boredom and keep them engaged. In addition, teachers have to give students an opportunity to involve in the teaching and learning process since young learners like to practice directly (learning by doing) rather than listen to the explanation, especially long one. According to Harmer (2008), unless activities are extremely engaging, they will get bored easily, losing interest after ten minutes or so. Henceforth, too much explanation and deductive teaching is likely not suitable with young learners' activities. Moreover, in the learning language, teacher should provide activities which sharpen their communication as the purpose of learning a language not just listen to the theory and do passive exercises, especially with

young learners. In order to provide a dynamic and exciting learning environment, particular methods for young learners tend to incorporate interactive and hands-on activities, visual aids, games, music, storytelling, and play-based learning. using these activities, children are given the opportunity to actively investigate and create their grasp of ideas and abilities (Ikawati, 2017).

However, the teaching of English in Indonesian elementary school faces several significant obstacles (Hijriati, 2023; Sholeh & Anam, 2020; Wahyuningsih, 2022). The lack of qualified English teachers is one of the prominent issues in TEYL in Indonesia. Many schools are unable to find English teachers, resulting in teachers without English language skills are assigned to teach English in their schools. This raises one question on how these teachers who do not have English education background teach English since non-English major teachers teaching English may lack the specific training and expertise needed to effectively teach the language. As it is known that ELT needs not only proficiency but also pedagogical knowledge to effectively teaching English. As a result, students may not receive the most optimal and comprehensive language teaching experience. This problem not only affects the quality of language teaching, but also potentially undermines students' overall language development and fluency. In addition, the lack of qualified English teachers may hinder the development of students' language skills, making it difficult for them to acquire the necessary language skills at a young age when language acquisition is most effective.

There is not enough research on how to help teachers who do not specialize in English to teach the language to young students. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by identifying ways in which these teachers

can be supported to improve their English language skills. Not only that, this study aims to make suggestions on how these teachers can be better supported in teaching English to young learners even they do not graduate from English department. Hopefully, this study will also contribute to the discussion on teacher training in elementary school and identify practical ways to improve help for teachers without English language skills. So that, young children in elementary school could have better experience in learning English.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

To seek for the answer, this preliminary study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to find out the challenges experienced by non-English teachers in teaching English to young learners and to seek further on strategies for enhancing their professional development.

The participants in this study consisted of eleven teachers who working in elementary school in one of public schools in Gresik. The participants came from non-English major teachers. A purposive sampling technique will be used to select a diverse group of non-English major teachers, aiming for a sample size that ensures rich and varied data.

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the participants. The interview questions focused on the challenges faced by non-English major teachers, their teaching activities, their professional development needs, and strategies for enhancing their English language instruction. To enrich the data, observations of classroom practices and interactions were conducted to provide a deeper understanding of teachers' pedagogical approaches and the implementation of professional development strategies.

Then, the data collected from interviews and observations were

analysed using thematic analysis. This method required identifying patterns, themes, and categories in the data to uncover key insights and findings related to professional development for non-English major teachers. The data coding was conducted to categorize and organize the information gathered from interviews and observations.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Teaching English in elementary schools plays a pivotal role in shaping the language skills of young learners as it not only introduces them to the basics of English but also cultivates awareness and deepens their understanding, facilitating their mastery of the language. This critical foundation sets the stage for future language development and academic success. By recognizing the significance of English education in elementary schools and taking proactive measures to enhance the quality and accessibility of ELT programs, educators and policymakers can empower students with the linguistic tools needed to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and competitive global landscape.

The findings revealed concerning trends in the state of English Language Teaching (ELT) within elementary education settings, suggesting a concerning lack of attention and priority given to English education at this level by government authorities. Such neglect not only stunts the growth of students' language proficiency but also hampers their overall educational achievement. Addressing these disparities and investing in robust English language programs at the elementary level is crucial to ensuring that students are adequately equipped with the necessary language skills for their academic journey and future endeavors.

The data from a questionnaire shown in the table 1 showed that the school under the study did not have English teacher. The students were taught

English by their homeroom teachers. Still based on the data provided, the teachers came from S1 PGSD (Primary School Teacher Education), Math Education, and PGMI (Teacher Training Education of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah). However, they have been teaching in elementary schools varies widely, with the majority having more than 10 years of experience. Only two of them have less than five years of experience. They claimed that their English proficiency levels are "Basic." Only two of them claimed a "Middle" level of proficiency.

Table 1 Participants' Demographic Information

Name	Gender	Age	Education	Experience
David	Male	31-40	S1 Math Education	1-2
Mirna	Female	26-30	S1 PGSD	3-5
Jenni	Female	31-40	S1 PGSD	>10
Salsa	Female	26-30	S1 PGMI	3-5
Sri	Female	31-40	S1 PGSD	6-10
Fatimah	Female	> 40	S1 PGSD	>10
Putri	Female	> 40	S1 PGSD	>10

Coming from other majors, the participants mentioned in the FGD that they encountered some problems. They said that it was hard for them to communicate with students due to their language proficiency as a result they were not confident using English instead they used Bahasa Indonesia and mix language in the language classroom. As stated by Sri that she wasn't confident using English as she was afraid of making mistakes in terms of grammar and vocabulary. It was agreed by other teachers that vocabulary and grammar were the main hinderance for them in their teaching practice. However, in the data from questionnaire revealed that the majority of teachers do teach grammar.

Further, in the FGD, one of the participants thought that the textbook they were using seemed useless since it focused on grammar which is not really important for the students in the elementary. That participant believed that speaking and communication should be

done more than grammar teaching. It is in line with the data taken from questionnaire that showed the participants rarely taught or did speaking activities as well as there was no speaking assessment. Also, pronunciation is sometimes taught by the participants. Speaking and pronunciation are important to be developed during early years of learning foreign language and the current curriculum is mandated to introduce the English through oral activities.

As a receptive skill, listening is somehow neglected. The participants mostly answered “sometimes” teaching listening. Listening is important skill to be taught in the early years since it acts as a receptive skill (Kurniawati et al., 2016; Latupono & Nikijuluw, 2022). The students are supposed to be exposed with listening activities, either from the teaching who use the target language or audio taken from medias such as YouTube or others (Jahrani & Listia, 2023).

Based on the findings above, it could be inferred that the teaching and learning doesn't run effectively since the teachers face barriers in terms of pedagogical practice and content knowledge. That finding is in line with other previous studies conducted by (Lokita & Utami, 2022; Pastika et al., 2023). It's not effective if a teacher who doesn't know English well is teaching the language. This might mean English education isn't getting enough attention and care. When teachers who aren't experts in English are asked to teach, it could mean that the rules and expectations for teaching English aren't being followed closely. As a result, students might not be getting the help they need to do well in English. Further, this could lead to students having a hard time learning English and facing challenges in school and work where English skills are needed. It also makes us wonder if the ways schools teach

languages are good enough, showing that we need to make sure students are getting quality English lessons. Having teachers without an English background in English classes might be a sign of bigger problems in the education system.

Teachers, as those who apply the curriculum, should be able to help students establish habits by performing appropriate teaching techniques to suit the conditions of the 21st century (Richards et al., 2001). In addition, teachers should avoid such activities which lead them to be afraid in trying. Also, teaching strategies for young learners should encompass a wide range of instructional approaches and techniques tailored to the developmental needs and characteristics of children to promote active engagement, meaningful learning, and holistic development, setting a strong foundation for their educational journey. Another important element is the assessment or evaluation should be done accordingly which could measure students' English skills.

One major challenge in teaching English is the inability to use suitable teaching techniques, methods, or approaches, leading to insufficient English language proficiency among teachers and students (Laila et al., 2023). Furthermore, numerous teachers continue to prioritize the teaching of grammar and isolated vocabulary, especially in elementary level. Likewise, they continue to provide students with rules followed by examples in a simplistic manner. Next, they are required to compose a sentence following the given formula. It could be understood that teaching grammar is essential as it forms the foundation of a language. However, it should be taught as a practical or communicative grammar. So, the students will perceive it not solely as knowledge or memorisable patterns unless teachers utilize it for communicative purposes.

Also, overuse of the mother tongue seems to be one of the factors that leads

to our students not gaining much in their English skills (Efendi et al., 2023). Teachers who often use their mother tongue to teach English, which makes them lose the opportunity to get exposure of English (Rosales & Gonzalez, 2020; Tosuncuoglu, 2012). The exposure plays important role in young learners' language development. Students who have more English exposure will gain benefits to get inputs and make use it to produce the target language (Jahrani & Listia, 2023; Littlewood & Yu, 2011). As we can learn from baby learns to listen first before they start to speak.

To add, looking at the language use in the classroom and grammar teaching, it could be inferred that the teaching and learning process is mostly conducted in Grammar Translation Method (GTM). This traditional methodology prioritizes the memorization of vocabulary and rules, emphasizing translation exercises and a focus on accuracy over communication. Consequently, GTM can sometimes hinder students' ability to develop communicative skills and fluency in the target language.

Drawing insights from the findings provided, it can be concluded that the participants involved in this study may not be fostering a communicative activity in their teaching practice. This lack of emphasis on communicative language teaching could potentially be issue in the students' essential English language skills development. Furthermore, the students may not have sufficient opportunities to engage in meaningful interaction.

What happen at the school under the study doesn't fit with the goals of Merdeka Curriculum. The spirit of English Language Teaching (ELT) embedded within the Merdeka curriculum highly emphasizes prioritizing communicative activities over a strict focus on grammar in phase A-C as presented in the table 2. The aim is to foster a dynamic language

environment that encourage the students to actively participate in applying the language skills. By stressing on oral communication skills, students are engaged in meaningful interactions and developed a strong foundation in language proficiency (Fransisca, 2023). The Merdeka curriculum has a strong commitment to introducing and building young learners' English skills through step by step and not making them confused by grammar or written activities.

Table 2 Phases of ELT in Merdeka Curriculum

Phase	Aims
A Grade 1-2	Focused on introducing English and spoken English language skills.
B Grade 3-4	Focused on spoken English skills. On the other side, students are introduced to the written form.
C Grade 5-6	Focused on written and spoken language skills. It is the end of the Elementary level.

As shown in the table above, the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasizes on oral proficiency not only cultivates confident and articulate communicators but also lays a solid groundwork for future language acquisition and mastery. In essence, by prioritizing communicative activities and oral skills development, the Merdeka Curriculum underscores the value of practical language use and experiential learning in shaping well-rounded and linguistically adept individuals.

Realizing they have difficulties in English teaching, the participants shared their eagerness in sharpening their English skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). They thought they needed professional development through a mentorship in developing their English skills. Other teachers said that they also needed an improvement in their pedagogical practices since they felt that their students didn't have interest in their teaching. They struggled with creating engaging lesson plans that meet students' needs, and difficulties with managing classroom behavior to ensure a good

learning environment. They also found it tough to adjust lesson materials to suit the needs of young learners and to accommodate different learning styles and abilities in a classroom.

Through professional development, they could be effective teachers and provide a great learning environment for their students. It is implied that they are all dedicated to becoming better teachers and enhancing their students' learning experiences.

4. SIMPULAN

In conclusion, the lack of attention and priority given to English education in elementary schools by government authorities is concerning as it hampers students' language proficiency and overall academic achievement. The use of non-English teachers to teach English can lead to issues in language teaching and hinder students' success in school and future endeavors. It is crucial to invest in robust English language programs at the elementary level to ensure students are equipped with the necessary language skills for their academic journey and beyond. Additionally, focusing on oral communication skills and providing professional development for teachers in terms of pedagogical competence can enhance the quality of English education in elementary schools and improve students' learning experiences.

This study could be a valuable reminder for Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD) to equip their students with English skills so that they could be ready in case they have to teach English at their future workplace. In today's increasingly globalized world, English proficiency has become a vital asset for educators, enabling them to effectively communicate with students from diverse backgrounds and enhance their teaching capabilities. Therefore, integrating comprehensive English language training within PGSD curricula can empower

future teachers to confidently navigate any teaching challenges involving English, ultimately contributing to an enriched learning environment and academic success for both teachers and students alike.

The findings of this study may be limited to the specific context of non-English major teachers in elementary settings in Indonesia and may not be generalizable to other educational contexts. Despite efforts to minimize bias, the researchers' perspectives and interpretations may influence the data analysis and findings.

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