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TEACHERS' CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS: CASE STUDY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Abstract: : Teaching English in elementary schools requires the appropriate strategies to enhance the effectiveness of learning. However, before implementing these strategies, teachers inevitably face challenges in the classroom, as experienced by four teachers at one of public elementary schools in Boyolali regency, Central Java. This study aims to examine the challenges and strategies taken by teachers to encounter in teaching English in elementary school in Boyolali regency based on teachers' experiences. This study used case study research design to analyze the challenges faced by teachers and strategies taken by teachers to overcome the challenges. The data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, and documentation of students' worksheets. The findings show that teachers faced four main challenges: 1) teachers' educational background, 2) limited time allocation, 3) students' condition in lower primary classrooms (year 1 and 2), and 4) lack of teacher training. To overcome these challenges, teachers apply four strategies, namely 1) teachers study independently before teaching, 2) teachers review the materials before continuing to new topics, 3) teachers use simple teaching methods, and 4) teachers use learning media to support teaching. Overall, the findings suggest teachers attempt to overcome the challenges of teaching English by adapting their teaching practices to students' needs and classroom conditions. However, independent preparation and the use of simple teaching methods and learning media need to be supported by appropriate teacher training to improve the quality of English language teaching in elementary schools.

Keywords**:** teachers challenges; teachers' strategies; elementary school; teaching English to young learners

INTRODUCTION

According to Linse and Nunan (2005), McKay (2008), and Simon (2010), children between the ages of two and thirteen are in a critical period for language learning. This period is very important because their natural ability to absorb language is at its peak. After this period, this ability declines, making language learning more difficult. Although children have a high capacity for language learning, they still need to be treated with care because they have different characteristics and learning needs than adults. Teaching English to young learners plays an important role in modern life as it helps them become familiar with the language, prepares them for further education, and builds their self-confidence. Vygotsky (1978, as cited by John-Steiner, Vera; Mahn, 1996) stated that, based on his research on young learners, their learning and development occur within a context, meaning they learn from what is happening around them. Therefore, young learners need teachers who are able to teach them effectively, supported by appropriate media and materials. In addition, young learners cannot be forced to follow what teachers want, as they tend to act based on their own preferences. They also have unpredictable emotions that can change quickly.

In Indonesia, English has long been taught in schools, but at the elementary school level it is still not a compulsory subject (Primary et al., 2023). In the Merdeka Curriculum, English is only included in local content or extracurricular activities, depending on the policy of each school (Dewi et al., 2023; Musthafa, 2010). Although it is not yet a compulsory subject, many

elementary schools in Solo are now teaching English in class. However, this condition will change in the near future, as the Indonesian government has officially announced that English will become a compulsory subject at the elementary school level starting from the 2027/2028 academic year, particularly for grades 3 to 6, as regulated in Permendikdasmen No. 13 of 2025 (*Kemendikdasmen* 2025). This policy aims to improve students' global communication skills from an early age and strengthen their competitiveness in an international context.

Teachers in elementary schools and kindergartens in Indonesia often experience difficulties in teaching English language skills and maintaining students' motivation during the learning process (Sudrajat & Appriliani, 2022; Oktavia et al., 2022). In addition, students' limited vocabulary, lack of exposure to English outside the classroom, and low learning motivation also become obstacles in English learning for children (Sudrajat & Appriliani, 2022; Hulu, 2024). Other factors that influence the learning process include students' socioeconomic background, mismatches between educational policies and actual school conditions, and the need for teachers to adapt to technological developments (Dewi et al., 2023; Khulel, 2021; Laila et al., 2023). Furthermore, limited learning facilities, lack of parental support, and insufficient technological competence also create challenges for teachers in implementing effective English instruction (Hulu, 2024; Mudra, 2020; Taghizadeh & Yourdshahi, 2020). In higher education, a research conducted by Normawati et al. (2025) found that challenges in implementing the English syllabus arise from both internal and external factors, including variations in students' English proficiency, differences in motivation and participation, rapid changes in educational demands requiring updated materials, and time constraints. To address these challenges, lecturers applied several strategies such as differentiated teaching, code-switching, updating teaching materials, and flexible time management.

Several studies have also examined the implementation of English teaching and related educational policies in elementary schools. Research shows that although English has been implemented as a local content subject in some elementary schools, its implementation still faces several challenges, such as the lack of clear national guidelines and teachers' reliance on commercially available materials for classroom instruction (Kaltsum & Habiby, 2020). In addition, the implementation of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) policies in various countries also reveals challenges such as teachers not being involved in the policy-making process, inconsistencies in implementation between regions, and limited funding and supporting technology (Azizah, 2025). Furthermore, several studies in other countries also discuss English learning at the elementary school level. A study conducted in Thailand by Octaberlina & Anggarini (2020) found that the use of picture cards can help students understand vocabulary more easily and increase their motivation in learning. Similarly, a study conducted by Șchiopu & Birzoi (2025) showed that the use of technology in English learning for young learners aged 6–7 years can improve students' language skills and make them more active during the learning process. These findings show that English teaching at the elementary level has been widely implemented in different countries, although the implementation still depends on the condition of each school, teacher, and available facilities.

In order to increase students' engagement in the learning process, teachers use a variety of teaching strategies, such as songs, games, review exercises, extensive practice opportunities, and memorization (Sudrajat & Appriliani, 2022; Muamaroh et al., 2024; Oktavia et al., 2022). The use of instructional media such as PowerPoint presentations, videos, and educative cartoons can also create a more active and enjoyable learning environment for students (Lesia et al., 2021). Furthermore, various instructional approaches such as expository learning, discovery

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learning, cooperative learning, context-based teaching and learning, and inquiry-based learning are employed to increase student participation in classroom activities (Prasetyo et al., 2024). Other studies also show that the use of learning media such as picture cards and a variety of engaging classroom activities can enhance students' motivation, participation, and vocabulary mastery during learning (Halimah et al., 2022; Octaberlina & Anggarini, 2020; Dharmayasa, 2023).

This study differs from previous studies by focusing specifically on the school context in a public elementary school in Boyolali regency, which was selected because it is located in a rural area where English is not commonly used in daily communication, and exploring the challenges faced by four teachers with different teaching experiences as well as the strategies they employ in teaching English to elementary school students, even though English is still classified as a local curriculum subject. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide insights to English teachers regarding the challenges they face and the appropriate strategies they can use when teaching English to early elementary school students.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative method with a case study design to explore the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English at the elementary school and the strategies they use to overcome those challenges. This research was conducted at a public elementary school in Boyolali Regency. The school was selected as the research site because it is located in a rural area where English is not commonly used in daily communication, so it presents unique challenges for both teachers and students in learning English.

The participants of the research were four English teachers with different teaching experiences. The teachers were 1) Mr. BP, 48 years old, who teaches sixth grade. He graduated from Elementary School Teacher Education with teaching experience of twenty years and ten years of teaching English; 2) Mr. AK, 37 years old, who teaches fourth grade, who graduated from an Islamic program and has teaching experience of ten years and five years of teaching English; 3) Mrs. ET, 34 years old, who teaches third and fifth grades and also taught fourth grade last semester, who also graduated from Elementary School Teacher Education in 2019, and she has six years of teaching in elementary school and three years of teaching English; and 4) Mrs. LI, 37 years old, who teaches first and second grades. She graduated from an Islamic program in 2016. She has taught English since 2022. All of them graduated from non-English study programs, and they were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: 1) currently teaching English at elementary school, 2) have at least one year of teaching English experience, and 3) are involved in developing or adapting English teaching materials.

This study used semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, and documentation to collect the data. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and used Bahasa Indonesia to obtain more detailed data. In addition, classroom observation was conducted to understand what happened during classroom activities by observing the teaching and learning process and recording important events (Ya-nan, 2023). The observation was conducted 3 times for each teacher with a duration of 70 minutes. In addition, the documentation included the students' worksheets. All data obtained from observation, documentation, and interviews were analyzed qualitatively using an interactive analysis model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Challenges Faced by Teachers in Teaching English to Young Learners

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Researcher found four main challenges faced by teachers in elementary school while teaching English. Namely, 1) teachers' educational background, 2) limited time allocation, 3) students' condition in lower primary classroom (year 1 and 2), and 4) lack of teacher training. The following are the challenges that English teacher faced in teaching English to young learners in an elementary school in Boyolali regency:

1. Teachers' Educational Background

   Based on observations, it was found that teachers had difficulty pronouncing English during lessons. Teachers were seen repeating the same word several times but with different pronunciations. According to all participants, this happened because they were not graduate from Department of English Education,

   This finding was supported by teachers' statements during interviews:

   Mrs. ET: "I am not from an English education background, so I did not study English in depth, only the basics such as greetings. Then, if I don't know the meaning or pronunciation of a word, I look it up on the internet before teaching."

   Mr. AK: "Actually, the children really enjoy learning English. Unfortunately, I am not fluent in English, so it may be a bit of a hindrance for the students, because I teach as best I can. I also did not graduate from English Education, but from Islamic Education."

   Mrs. LI: "I graduated from the Faculty of Islamic Study, so I didn't study English in depth. When I teach, I usually use the internet, like Google or YouTube. Basically, I just teach vocabulary. Like numbers, fruits, and animals"

   Mr. BP: "I graduated from the Elementary Education program in 1995, and I taught at another elementary school for about 9 to 10 years before coming to this school. To be honest, while teaching English at this school, I was a bit confused about how to read it and use it, so I just taught to the best of my ability."

2. Limited Time Allocation

   Another challenge faced by teachers is the limited time allocation. In this school, English lessons are only conducted once a week for 2 hours of lesson or 70 minutes. Teachers stated that this time is not always sufficient because students often forget the material learned in the previous week.

   Mrs. LI: "I think one lesson a week is not enough, because students usually forget what they learned the previous week, so I have to review it every day. Also, I teach grades 1 and 2, so the students still like to play rather than study, so it's difficult to review the previous material all the time."

   Mr. BP: "As for the duration of the lessons, there's only one session per week, and each session lasts 70 minutes. With that amount of time, it's not enough for sixth grade because there's so much new material to learn, like the second verb forms. So, learning the past tense takes a very long time in class, it takes about three weeks just to finish the past tense, and there's still a lot of material left to learn."

   Mr. ET: "Just once a week. In third grade, that's not enough if there's only one session per week, because in third grade most students are slow to learn things unlike in fifth grade. Fifth graders absorb information quickly, so once a week in fifth grade is enough."

3. Students' conditions in lower primary classroom (year 1 and 2)

   Classroom management in lower primary classroom also becomes a challenge. Based on observations, many students still do not pay attention to lessons and often

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leave during class hours. Teachers also still use lecture methods more often because it is difficult to apply other methods with younger students.

Mrs. LI: "I use lecture and dialogue methods with students. Games? Yes, but very rarely. I use the lecture method more often. Because I am not confident in my own abilities, I prefer the lecture method. It is difficult to use other methods in first and second grade because the students are still unable to sit still in their seats."

Mrs. ET: In my view, third-grade students still want to play, so they don't pay much attention in class. That's why I sometimes use games, but once I introduce them, they just want to play games all the time. I find it a bit challenging to apply games in every lesson.

4. Lack of teachers' Training

Lastly, lack of teacher training became one of the challenges that teachers faced. It was observed that teachers still lack confidence in their own abilities and rarely use English during lessons. According to the teachers, there has been no training provided for teachers who teach English. This finding supported by interviews:

Mrs. ET: "The government here only provides teaching materials, but there is no training. There should be training, and they say they will try to provide it, but as of 2025, there has been no training at all for English teachers."

Mr. BP: "There should be training, especially in this sub-district where there is only one English teacher who graduated from an English study program, so the majority of elementary schools here have English teachers based on availability."

Mr. AK: "In my opinion, we really need teacher training so that teachers understand how to conduct lessons properly, because so far there hasn't been any teacher training, just coordination among teachers within this sub-district. After all, most of us aren't English majors, unless the government provides teachers who have actually studied English."

Strategies to Overcome these Challenges

To overcome these challenges, teachers apply four main strategies during the learning process. The following are the strategies that teacher used to overcome those challenges:

1. Teachers study independently before teaching

To overcome the first challenge, teacher often self-learning before teaching. Because all of English teachers in this school are not from an English education background, they often prepare themselves by searching for the meaning and pronunciation of English words on the internet before teaching the material in class. From the interviews, it was found that teachers studied the material independently before teaching the next day. Teachers looked up the meanings of vocabulary words, then how to pronounce them and examples of their use so that they would not make mistakes when delivering the material.

Mrs. ET: "Because I am not very proficient in English, I usually study the night before teaching. I look up vocabulary on the internet, and for grammar, I look up the rules to understand how to write certain things."

Mrs. LI: "Actually, before every lesson, I always check the internet first to look up the material, how to pronounce it, and how to write it. I do that for every lesson."

Mr. AK: "If I'm unsure about how to pronounce something, I look it up first. Especially when it relates to games, I prepare for those well in advance."

2. Teachers review the material before continuing to new topics

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Based on observations, the teachers were seen repeating the same material over and over again. According to the teacher, this was done to ensure that the students had understood last week's material. As said by Mrs. LI and Mrs. ET during the interviews:

Mrs. LI: "I think one lesson a week is not enough, because students usually forget what they learned the previous week, so I have to review it every day. Also, I teach grades 1 and 2, so the students still like to play rather than study, so it's difficult to review the previous material all the time."

Mrs. ET: "For me, it's sufficient, but if possible, it should be increased because I also need time to remember the material I will teach. I need extra time. Sometimes, I repeat the last week's material."

3. Teachers use simple teaching methods

To overcome the third challenge, teacher apply simple method in teaching English. The teachers used three methods such as questions and answer method, drilling, and games in order to make students more active and understand the material more easily.

Mrs. ET: "In teaching, I use the communicative teaching method as well as question and answer, then combine it with games and drilling so that students are more active. This makes the class more enjoyable."

Mr. BP: "I often use the questions and answer method, usually with the help of flashcards. I also often ask students to read vocabulary words, and usually correct them if they make a mistake."

Mrs. LI: "I teach lower primary classes, so I focus more on vocabulary through basic drills. Then I give them scrambled words, and they have to guess the correct spelling."

4. Teachers use learning media to support teaching

Teachers also use flashcards and online media such as videos, Quizizz, and Wordshake to make students more enthusiastic during the lesson. This finding is supported by interviews:

Mr. BP: "When using flashcards, one student brings the meanings, while another student brings the English words. Then the children scramble to match mine with whose partner's."

Mrs. ET: "When playing videos or quizzes, I use the smart TV available at this school. So, I often use children's songs, storytelling, and short videos to attract students' interest, so that learning is more fun and easier to understand."

In addition, during the observation, teachers often use basic learning resources such as textbooks, worksheets, and simple learning materials to support the learning process, whether for completing assignments, assessments, or simply memorizing vocabulary listed in the worksheets.

Mrs. LI: "The media is usually only in the form of print media, such as textbooks and LKS. We rarely use technology. At most, once every two or three weeks, I play a video from YouTube."

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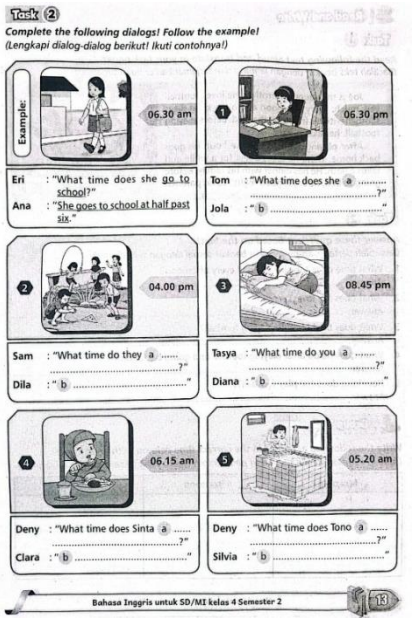


Figure 1. Example of Students' Worksheets



Figure 2. Example of Youtube Videos Teachers' Use

Discussion

This finding is in line with previous studies which found that teachers often experience difficulties in teaching English language skills and maintaining students' motivation during the learning process (Oktavia et al., 2022; Sudrajat & Appriliani, 2022). Other studies also reported that limited professional training and limited facilities can influence the effectiveness of English teaching in schools (Dewi et al., 2023; Hulu, 2024). The similarity of these findings might be because many elementary school teachers who teach English are not from an English education background, which affects their confidence and ability when teaching English in the classroom.

This study also found that limited time allocation becomes one of the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English in elementary school. In this study, English lessons are only conducted once a week, so students often forget the material that has been learned previously. This finding supports previous research which shows that English learning for young learners often faces several challenges related to the learning process and classroom conditions (Amalia et al., 2025; Khulel, 2021; Laila et al., 2023). In addition, the implementation of English as a local content subject in elementary schools can also influence the learning process because schools have the authority to determine how English is taught in their institutions (Kaltsum &

Habiby, 2020). Young learners usually need repetition and continuous exposure to English in order to understand the material more easily. Therefore, teachers often need to review the previous material before continuing to the next lesson.

Another challenge found in this study is students' conditions in lower primary classroom. Based on the findings, students in lower grades still have difficulty focusing during the lesson and often prefer to play rather than study. This finding is similar to previous research which reported that students' motivation and learning engagement can influence the effectiveness of English learning in the classroom (Appriliani, 2022; Muamaroh et al., 2024). The similarity of these findings might occur because young learners tend to have a short attention span and require more interactive and enjoyable learning activities during the learning process.

This study also found that teachers rarely receive training related to English language teaching. The lack of teacher training makes teachers feel less confident in their abilities and rarely use English during the lesson. This finding supports previous studies which found that limited professional training and insufficient teacher preparation can become challenges in implementing English teaching effectively (Azizah, 2025; Dewi et al., 2023). In addition, other studies also reported that limited technological competence and learning facilities can affect teachers' ability to deliver English lessons effectively (Mudra, 2020; Taghizadeh & Yourdshahi, 2020).

To overcome these challenges, teachers apply four main strategies during the learning process namely, 1) teachers study independently before teaching, 2) teachers review the material before continuing to new topics, 3) teachers use simple teaching methods, and 4) teachers use learning media to support teaching. In this study, teachers used three methods such as questions and answer method, drilling, and games in order to make students more active and understand the material more easily. Teachers also used three learning media such as flashcards, online media, and printed media to support the learning process. This finding is in line with previous studies which found that teachers often use songs, games, drilling techniques, and repeated practice to increase students' engagement in English learning (Appriliani, 2022; Muamaroh et al., 2024; Oktavia et al., 2022). In addition, the use of learning media such as videos, flashcards, and other visual materials can also create a more active and enjoyable learning environment for students (Lesia et al., 2021; Octaberlina & Anggarini, 2020).

Other studies also show that engaging learning activities and interactive media can help increase students' participation and vocabulary mastery in English learning (Halimah et al., 2022; Dharmayasa, 2023). Another strategy found in this study is that teachers prepare themselves before teaching by searching for the meaning and pronunciation of English words on the internet. This strategy shows that teachers try to improve their understanding of the material before teaching it in the classroom. In addition, teachers also review the previous material before continuing to the next lesson because English lessons are only conducted once a week. These strategies show that teachers try to adapt their teaching practices based on the classroom situation and the learning conditions in the school.

However, some findings of this study are slightly different from previous studies. Some previous research found that teachers used various teaching approaches such as expository learning, discovery learning, cooperative learning, contextual teaching and learning, and inquiry-based learning in English instruction (Prasetyo et al., 2024). In contrast, the findings of this study show that teachers tend to use simpler teaching methods such as question and answer, direct explanation, and simple dialogue during the learning process. These differences might

occur because the teachers in this study are not from an English education background and have limited teaching time and training opportunities.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the teaching of English in public elementary school in Boyolali regency is still conducted in relatively simple ways, such as direct explanation from the teacher, vocabulary memorization, short quizzes, and question and answer activities during the learning process. The findings also show that teachers faced four challenges in teaching English, such as teachers' educational background, limited time allocation, classroom management in lower grades, and the lack of teacher training. Teachers' educational background become main challenges in teaching English at public elementary school. In addition, classroom management in lower grades is also challenging because students often have difficulty focusing during the lesson. To deal with these challenges, teachers apply four strategies such as self-learning before teaching, review the last week's material, using simple methods, as well as using learning media such as flashcards, online media, and printed media. Teachers prepare themselves before teaching by searching for the meaning and pronunciation of English words. Overall, the findings indicate that the teaching of English in elementary school is influenced not only by the learning material but also by teachers' competence, classroom conditions, and the limited time available for English learning.

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