

Challenges faced by student teachers in teaching English to young learner in elementary school

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English to young learners presents its own set of challenges for teachers. And this research aims to explain some challenges faced from the perspectives of student teachers in internship programs and to describe some chosen strategies to overcome the problem. The research method used in this research was descriptive design in a qualitative approach. The participants of this research were two participants who had just completed their internship program in elementary school. To collect the data, an interview was used. The data were analyzed by using descriptive qualitative techniques. thematic analysis used for the data from the interview. The finding show that there are some challenges faced by student teachers in conducting the internship which are student's short attention, difficulties in delivering material, low learning interest, diverse levels of student comprehension. And the strategy used is to create engaging lessons, giving appreciation, deliver material instructionally, giving motivation and dividing students based on the students' interest.

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1. Introduction

Teaching English to young learners is an educational process that focuses on instructing the English language to children in their early developmental stages. Early age in this context is determined by the emphasis not only on language learning but also on preparing children to compete globally using English as a primary foundation, considering its widespread use worldwide. And teaching English to young learners is based on various factors, one of which is that children at an early age can absorb and learn languages quickly and easily. As stated by Kuhl (2010), children learn languages more easily than adults due to their critical period, when their brains are more adept at naturally absorbing and comprehending language swiftly. This also aligns with the findings of Kaiser et al. (2015), asserting that children excel in language learning due to their higher brain plasticity at a young age. Their increased brain plasticity allows them to adapt to new language rules and sounds better than adults. Hence, it can be concluded from both statements that children's brains at a young age are highly responsive to language acquisition, making the language learning process more accessible to absorb.

While many experts recognize the widespread acknowledgment of young learners' ease in absorbing language learning, numerous studies reveal that teaching language to young learner is challenging. Research conducted by Hashemi & Azizinez (2011) uncovered several challenges faced

by teachers when instructing children, such as short attention spans and high physical energy levels among the children. Another study by Gourneau (2014) identified managing student behaviour as one of the five common challenges teachers face while instructing. Additionally, Octaviana (2017) highlighted that young learners tend to lose interest quickly during teaching sessions and struggle to maintain motivation in tasks they perceive as difficult. Thus, despite children having a natural inclination to learn languages swiftly, the teaching process is not devoid of obstacles.

Considering the challenges highlighted in previous research, a perspective that considers the student-teacher viewpoint in teaching is necessary, enabling educators to understand classroom instruction dynamics better. On the other hand, there needs to be more research discussing the student-teacher perspective in teaching English to young learners. One such study conducted by Camlibel (2016) titled "Teaching English to Young Learners: Some Challenges Faced by Pre-service Teachers" focused on how observing young learner classrooms impacted aspiring teachers' enthusiasm and readiness to teach in primary school. The findings indicated that almost all future educators stressed the benefits and importance of supplementing their studies with hands-on classroom experience. Another survey by Damar et al. (2013) titled "Teaching English to Young Learners: Through the Eyes of EFL Teacher Trainers" investigated the perspectives of teacher trainers on early-age L2 learning and suitable methodologies for teaching English to young learners.

Furthermore, Megawati (2015) conducted research titled "Challenges in teaching EFL for pre-service young learner's teachers," revealing potential challenges faced by students in English Language Teaching for Elementary Schools and proposing strategies to enhance their English language performance, employing interviews and questionnaires as research instruments. Lastly, a qualitative study by Abdillah & Fihriani (2023) titled "Indonesian EFL Pre-service Teacher's Experience: Revealing English Instructional Challenges during Teaching Practice" investigated challenges faced by pre-service EFL teachers in Indonesia while teaching English during practice sessions. Findings indicated that pre-service EFL teachers needed help effectively communicating instructions, linked to inadequate resources, limited access to media, inadequate preparation, disruptive student behaviour, insufficient English language proficiency, and pedagogical knowledge.

Based on the explanation above, this research focus on understanding the challenges of teaching English to young learners in Elementary School, along with their solutions from the perspective of student teachers who have taught at Muhammadiyah Suronatan Elementary School. This article aims to contribute to a better understanding of the challenges in teaching English to young learners and provide solutions that can be utilized to address these challenges. It also aims to offer helpful guidance for English educators, particularly those undergoing internships, to enhance the effectiveness of English teaching at the elementary school level.

2. Method

This research was carried out at the English Language Education Student Practicum School at SD Muhammadiyah Suronatan Yogyakarta, which is located in the Suronatan NG II/834 Notoprajan, Ngampilan, Yogyakarta 55262 area. This school was chosen as a research location to discover the obstacles and strategies experienced by Practical Language Teaching Student Teachers—English in primary school. The research method used in this research is qualitative. Qualitative research is a method used to examine the condition of natural objects, where the researcher is the critical instrument (Sugiyono, 2016). The subjects in this research include two student teachers because they want to see the obstacles and strategies of the student teachers in teaching English in elementary schools.

The data collection technique used interviews. The respondents in this interview were two student teachers at SD Muhammadiyah Suronatan: Anggi as the first participant (P1) and Laila as the second participant (P2). The interview was carried out in a semi-structured model where this interview was an ongoing interview referring to a series of open questions. This method allows new questions to arise due to the answers given by the resource person so that information can be explored in more depth during the session. The structure of this interview was prepared to fulfill the research objectives by using an instrument containing verbal questions relevant to the research focus. To conduct data analysis, interviews were recorded and stored securely in a computer folder. After data processing is complete, the security of the interview is maintained and is only used for research purposes. Audio is previously converted into written data through a transcription process. Next, Creswell (2012) suggests a coding phase: 1. Divide large amounts of data into smaller parts so that it is easier to find interesting

information. 2. The text transcription is broken down into smaller parts, so it is easier to find information relevant to the topic. 3. Underline the code to give it an initial label. 4. The next step is to find similar codes and group them into smaller sets, which are further reduced to create broader categories or themes.

3. Findings and Discussion

The following are the results of the analysis of interview data with the two sources regarding the challenges of teaching young learners and the strategies used during teaching.

3.1. Short student concentration

When teaching, children's attention only lasts for a short time during teaching and learning activities. As stated by the two participants.

"At the beginning of the lesson, students pay enough attention to what the teacher says. However, in the middle minutes of class, students carry out activities other than studying and repeatedly have to be reminded to pay attention or do assignments." (P1)
"When I deliver material, children are easily distracted by other things and unconsciously carry out other activities outside of the teacher's orders" (P2)

According to Piaget in Mahajaya thesis (2021), children have a range of concentrations based on age. 6-year-olds have 12-18 minutes of attention, and 12-year-olds have 24-36 minutes. This affects the learning process where lower class students, namely classes 1-3, aged 6-8 years, have short concentration time. Their cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities are still very much developed at that age, so their focus on learning can only last for a while. To overcome the problem of short children's concentration, student teachers have a strategy, namely by preparing learning media such as games that are liked by students that are appropriate to their age characteristics who still like to play. Fun learning media such as games are learning media suitable for children, according to Latif et al. (2021) in their research stating that educational games are packaged for the student learning process to stimulate thinking power and are one way to increase student concentration in learning. Study. Games are a natural means for children to engage in learning and maintain focus on the material (Klimova, 2015). A survey conducted by Mubaslat (2012) proves and recommends teaching using games because it is effective and stimulates concentration in learning. Creating a pleasant learning atmosphere for student teachers allows students to remain focused on the learning process.

3.2. Classroom Management

Creating a learning environment is part of classroom management, which is an obstacle faced by both participants.

"Often, when children complete assignments and report future assignments to the teacher, classroom conditions become uncondusive. A child is screaming and playing with others. conditioning children is done repeatedly." (P1)
"I have difficulty conditioning the children during class hours. At the beginning of learning, students can be conditioned, but a few minutes later, the students start to be less condusive. They do other activities." (P2)

Generally, elementary school students' characteristics are still in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor stages of development. Elementary school children aged 6-12 years have an individual and active nature. Several characteristics of elementary school-age children support the first interviewee's difficulties regarding teaching English in elementary schools. The first is that elementary school-age children like to play, the second is that students like to move and work in groups, and the fourth is that students want to feel or do something directly (Mutia, 2021). As the first resource person, the student teacher carries out conditioning by overcoming it with strategies that are always more sensitive to the student's learning process. Always praise when students have completed assignments to maintain student enthusiasm so that they are always enthusiastic and complete learning well. To ensure optimal educational and teaching effects, the most essential content of appreciation education is to affirm students' positive learning behavior and let students be in a positive environment during

the learning process (Fang & Cao, 2016). Giving appreciation to students can make students feel happy, when they are appreciated they will feel more valued and loved. So appreciation can make students more confident in the learning process (Kirana & Al Badri, 2020). Henderlong and Lepper (2002) also stated that giving praise or appreciation can increase strong motivation in children to learn language with enthusiasm.

For Student Teachers, the second resource person has a strategy to overcome this, namely by always preparing enjoyable learning activities so that children's attention remains focused and conducive to teaching and learning activities. This also makes student teachers have to be creative. Teachers' creative learning greatly influences students' understanding because the more creative the teacher is in delivering the material, the easier it is for students to understand the lesson, making students more creative. Students will not get bored in lessons, and teachers will find it easier to create a pleasant classroom atmosphere (Supartini et al., 2016). Creating enjoyable teaching is the key to creating a productive class. As research by Fayombo (2012) highlights, making the learning environment fun by creating various teaching methods can maintain active student involvement in the learning process.

3.3. Delivery of material

Delivering English language material to young learners is a difficulty faced during teaching.

"I have difficulty conveying material to students because children have less language or vocabulary compared to adults; sometimes, I have to explain the material repeatedly so that I can make sure students can follow what I say." (P2)

In theory, vocabulary mastery increases with age. The older a person is, the richer his vocabulary becomes. This is based on the level of comprehension of a reading. So, the older a person gets, the richer their vocabulary becomes (Zahro & et al, 2020). This is what makes the second resource person face challenges in delivering English material. To face these challenges, the resource person used a strategy of delivering learning material slowly. According to Teresa & Guillén, (2008) children naturally like repetitive learning processes. So that with this strategy, students can capture and follow the learning well.

3.4. Students' Interest in Learning is Low

The challenge encountered by student teachers in the learning process is students' low interest in learning.

"When I was teaching, I found that children showed a reluctance to learn. For example, when they are asked to read or answer questions using English, they repeatedly say 'can't speak English,' or when asked to do assignments, they do other activities."(P1)

The child's attitude can indicate that the child has low interest or motivation in learning English. In this case, there are two factors that cause students to have low motivation to learn English, usually due to internal reasons; first, students do not like the lessons given by the teacher. English is known as a quite difficult subject to learn. With this, students have the stigma that English is a difficult subject, so they have no interest in learning English (Komara & Tiarsiwi, 2021). The second factor is that they lack motivation; every motivation has a big influence on the learning process and outcomes, so support from the teacher, family, and the surrounding environment has a big influence on the English learning process (Hidayati et al., 2022). To face this challenge, the resource person faced it by providing learning motivation. Based on what the resource person experienced, every student has good English language skills. You just need motivation and support to grow your self-confidence to learn English. This is supported by resource persons who always provide support and convince students that they can carry out the learning process well. Teachers must positively increase student motivation inside and outside the learning context to improve the educational environment and strengthen the values in their teaching (Alcívar et al., 2021).

3.5. Students' levels of understanding vary

Students' diverse English language abilities are one of the main challenges in teaching and learning English in elementary schools.

"In each class, there are differences between students, where some students are able to understand English learning quite well, while other students are still considered to lack understanding of learning or the results of work on assignments in class."(P2)

Of course, this creates a gap in English in the learning process in class. Because students' levels of understanding vary, this often affects the effectiveness of teaching, which ultimately creates challenges in the process of teaching English in the classroom. These varying levels of ability often affect the effectiveness of teaching time because a teacher cannot possibly let his students fall behind in their learning. According to Yestiani & Zahwa (2020), teachers are not only providers of material in the learning process, but teachers also act as facilitators. As a facilitator, the teacher's role is to help students receive and understand the lesson material so that the learning process becomes more efficient and effective. It is also not easy to provide the same teaching if you have students with different abilities in one class and there are many students. Therefore, the strategy to deal with this is to divide students into study groups based on the student's abilities and interests in learning. According to Nurhasanah & Sobandi (2016), when students learn according to their interests, it will influence the results of the student's learning, so dividing them into learning interest groups will improve the student's learning abilities.

Facing the challenge of gaps in students' abilities is not easy to do, so the strategy used is to measure students' abilities using interesting strategies and approaches. According to Safitri & Ayu Ningsih (2020), learning models that are suitable for certain levels of education must be adjusted to the level of student development and learning elements such as learning speed, motivation, interest, student activity, and feedback and reinforcement. What is no less important is that the learning model must be based on a learning approach that is oriented to the latest learning ideas. So, to face this challenge, the teacher uses an interesting strategic approach, such as games, quizzes, interactives, and the use of other learning technology. According to Maritsa et al. (2021), technology has created new methods that attract students' attention and facilitate their understanding of learning material.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of research regarding the challenges and strategies faced by student teachers in teaching English in elementary schools, it can be concluded that the two participants expressed various challenges, including students having short focus time, difficulties in conditioning the class, difficulties in delivering material, students having low interest in learning English, and students' varying levels of understanding. Participants also revealed that the strategy used to face these challenges was generally to meet students' needs during learning. Most of the challenges experienced by student teachers in teaching English in elementary schools are related to the characteristics of elementary school-age children who are still at the stage of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development, as well as classroom management abilities.

The several challenges discussed show that the teacher's role in accompanying students' development in learning English is very important. Elementary school students are the initial students who will continue their learning to the next level. So, students must be able to learn English well. So, for student teachers, it is important to learn more about the characteristics of elementary school students and equip themselves with creative and innovative abilities so that student's learning needs are met, and student teachers have adequate abilities when they become teachers in the future.

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Supplementary Material

Supplementary material that may be helpful in the review process should be prepared and provided as a separate electronic file. That file can then be transformed into PDF format and submitted along with the manuscript and graphic files to the appropriate editorial office.