

Challenges of An Elementary School English Teacher: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract: To ensure that that students have the skills in the future, teaching English language in elementary school level is essential. However, in the process, it experiences various challenges, especially when being carried out in domestic places where there are limitations existing. The focus of this research is to determine the challenges faced by an English teacher at Muhammadiyah Jogokariyan Elementary School and strategies that have been implemented to solve the problems. This qualitative research used semi-structured interview with the English teacher at Muhammadiyah Jogokariyan Elementary School. The results showed that the existing problems can be categorized into three i.e. the problems of the students, teachers, and supporting facilities. From students, challenges emerged such as lack of enthusiasm, low concentration, and low vocabulary. Meanwhile, the challenge that arises from teachers is a lack of understanding of teaching methods. Furthermore, problems related to facilities are present because schools do not provide adequate facilities to support the teacher to conduct the teaching process smoothly for both teachers and the students. In working with these problems, the teacher has utilized and implemented some strategies.

Keywords: Challenges And Strategies, Elementary School, TEYL

INTRODUCTION

Many countries use English to communicate, even UN countries also use English to communicate. After Indonesian independence, English language education began to be intensively improved (Maili & Hestningsih, 2017). To improve students' English skills, various programs and approaches have been created. However, the results are still far from expectations. Students are still not able to communicate well in English (Ilmiah et al., 2020). To ensure that students have the skills in the future, English language education at primary school level is essential. This is supported by opinion (Maili, 2018). Firstly, English lessons allow students to move on to the next level of education without being surprised; second, English is a foreign language that is more easily accepted by elementary school students; and third, in the era of globalization, many terms and technologies use English (Irianto, 2022).

According (Johnstone, 2009), teaching English in schools is perhaps the greatest advancement in education which is becoming increasingly important in the world, including Indonesia, where political, social and trade barriers are increasing. This suggests that the English language is showing a new awareness of the importance of the modern world. One thing that is clear is that teachers have to teach English to their students of increasing and decreasing age. Nowadays, the number of English programs, classes and lessons for children is increasing. The government has introduced English courses in primary schools recently and some kindergartens already teach children English during the preschool years (Kai Jian & Syahtia Pane, 2020).

Although the concept of teaching English is stronger, the practice is more difficult. Merdeka's curriculum teaches English in two parts, in first and fourth grade (Hastasasi, 2022). Students in grades 1, 2, and 3 are categorized as lower classes, while students in grade 4,5 and 6 are categorized as upper classes, so they are

better prepared to start lessons. Teaching English in elementary school level is not an easy task. Many problems faced by teachers and students, as demonstrated (Cahyati & Madya, 2019). Teaching English as a foreign language is a challenge for all teachers, regardless of their experience, but it is a rewarding career choice. Teachers face various problems every day that they must learn to overcome, adapt to students' needs, and find ways to overcome these problems. Most importantly, to achieve communicative success in language teaching. English has actually discovered many important things (Alkins et al., 2006).

Based on the study authored by Reem Abdullah, "Teacher Challenges in Middle School Classrooms and their Relationship to Teaching Performance from Educational Supervisor' Perception". Teachers face a number of problems while teaching English. Teachers face problems such as inappropriate teaching aids, overcrowded classrooms, and noisy environments. Inappropriate props and overcrowded classrooms are problems teachers face in teaching English. The challenges make teachers and students stressed and frustrated. Therefore, teachers can build an effective learning management system by incorporating important elements of classroom management such as classroom organization, planning, effective use of materials, and selection of appropriate activities to achieve their goals. Apart from that, teaching challenges also occur especially for secondary school teachers in rural areas of Southeast Sulawesi Province. This research was conducted in an English class where challenges in learning English were found for teachers. (Pasassung, 2003) study is entitled "Teaching English In An "Acquisition-Poor Environment": An Ethnographic Example of A Remote Indonesian EFL Classroom. One of the problems that arises is inadequate facilities. Teachers have to answer questions from students' books because they don't have a teacher's book. As a result, teachers lack clear and practical instructions on how to complete class assignments. Students need something real rather than theory; they need a safety tool that can help them understand the subject matter. (Cahyati & Madya, 2019) add most schools do not have adequate safety tools. Without adequate media and teaching, teachers will not be able to conduct fun activities that involve the physical movement of students.

According to (Evertson, 1994), another challenge that teachers often face is dealing with crowd situations in the classroom. When explaining the lesson Students face difficulties such as students are busy with themselves, doing their own work, and playing with their friends in class. Apart from that, students are very active, running and moving throughout the class while disturbing their other friends and also disturbing the teacher. (Mumary Songbatumis, 2017) in the research entitled Challenges in Teaching English Faced by English Teachers at MTsN Taliwang, Indonesia. A number of challenges emerged, some coming from students, some from teachers, and some from others. School facilities. Students are challenged by lack of vocabulary mastery, low concentration, lack of discipline, boredom, and difficulty speaking. Meanwhile, the challenges of teachers are the limited age of teacher training, language skills problems, limited mastery of teaching methods, lack of understanding of IT, and lack of professional development. Besides, facility problems include inequality of resources and facilities, as well as time constraints. A solution to such challenges is also suggested in this study. The efforts made are divided into two; the efforts made by the school and by the English teacher. Appreciation of attitudes and enhancement of resources and facilities are the most important solutions taken by MTsN Taliwang. On the other hand, apply various teaching methods and techniques, matching student skill levels and learning situations, leveraging available resources and facilities, providing motivating feedback, finding methods or materials, and teacher self-reflection are English teacher efforts in addressing the challenge of teaching English.

Muhammadiyah Jogokariyan Elementary School is one of the private schools in Yogyakarta which has implemented an independent curriculum as the basis for teaching in schools and requires English subjects to be taught from grade one to grade six. The school even holds extracurricular English as a form of education

support for improving language skills. However, in the implementation of learning and teaching there are still many challenges from both students and teachers.

However, based on the author's initial observations during the Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL) practicum at Muhammadiyah Jogokariyan elementary school, Teacher experienced difficulties in learning English.

Based on the phenomenon above, researchers want to conduct further research to help other teachers identify problems and how to solve them. Since English must be taught at every level of schooling, teachers must be given proper attention to achieve the objectives of teaching English. Teachers try their best to ensure that their lessons are successful in the classroom. Teachers must have various ways to deal with problems that can cause problems in teaching and hinder the learning process. So, in this research there are two variables that will be discussed, namely what challenges are faced by elementary school teachers at Muhammadiyah Jogokariyan Elementary School and what strategies teachers use to deal with the challenges.

METHOD

Research design

This research uses descriptive research with a qualitative approach. Descriptive research is a type of research that uses data to describe symptoms, conditions and current circumstances. (Moleong, 2019) states that "Descriptive is data in the form of words and not numbers." According to (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018), descriptive research is usually carried out with the main aim, namely describing the facts and characteristics of the objects and subjects being explored. This research focuses on describing teachers' challenges in teaching English and how teachers can deal with that.

Research Subject

The subject in this research was a teacher who taught lower class English at Muhammadiyah Jogokariyan Elementary School with the initial AN. Teachers are being main research subject is because are people who really knows about the data to be collected, namely the challenges of teachers in teaching English class.

Intervention Procedure

Data collection techniques in this research, researchers used interviews. According to (Wiratha, 2006), interviews are a way of collecting data that is carried out through communication, through contact or personal relationships between data collectors (interviewers) and informants (data sources). The type of interview used in this research is a semi-structured interview which combines elements of structured interviews and unstructured interviews. The interviewer is free to ask for clarification and even ask additional questions if he feels the answers are not satisfactory, even though the questions have been determined previously (Griffie, 2005).

Instrument

According to (Sugiyono, 2017), "A research instrument is a tool used in research to measure observed natural and social phenomena." In this research, researchers use Interview guidelines. An interview guide is questions prepared by the researcher to collect research-relevant data and variables. Interview questions are adopted from (Wulandari, 2019) journal.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Results of interview with English Teacher at SD Muhammadiyah Jogokariyan

Researchers complete the research procedure through interviews, as evidenced by the results of interviews. Based on interview, there are challenges faced by Muhammadiyah Jogokariyan Elementary School's teacher in teaching English. The challenges do not only come from the student side, but also come from the teacher side and the facility side.

a. Student's Side. The findings reveal that the main challenge in teaching English comes from the students. There are challenges found from the student's side include lack of enthusiasm, Student's lack of vocabulary mastery, and low student concentration.

a) *Lack of enthusiasm.* AN said that one of the teaching challenges that comes from students is the lack of enthusiasm of students to learn English. It reduces the essence of students to learn the language. *"....Some of the students complained that they didn't want to learn English. The feel English is difficult to learn and understand which made them feel like didn't need to learn English because it was considered unimportant."* Regarding this issue, (Yusriyah, 2020) stated that effective and constructive learning activities not only involve cognitive processes but also feelings and emotions. Therefore, students must have enthusiasm for learning. Because English has five components (listening, reading, speaking, structure, and writing), learning English requires great enthusiasm from students. Apart from that, students have to memorize a lot of vocabulary in order to be able to construct sentences using English grammar and directly pronounce the sentences they want (Singh et al., 2020). These elements cannot be combined without enthusiasm. Therefore, students will not get optimal results and their input cannot be applied correctly in their daily lives without enthusiasm.

b) *Lack of vocabulary mastery.* AN stated that not having enough vocabulary is one of the challenges in teaching English in the classroom, making it more difficult for students to understand the material. *"There are children whose parents have been taught English since childhood, so they are more active in class. Meanwhile, there are also children who cannot interpret English vocabulary at all so they choose not to actively ask questions and participate."* (Hasan, 2016) states that vocabulary mastery is one of the biggest challenges for students. Maruyama (1996), quoted by (Hoa & Mai, 2016), stated that one of the three reasons why students lack vocabulary mastery is because they do not use English in everyday life, which makes them feel there is no need to learn vocabulary.

c) *Low student concentration.* Due to low concentration of students in class, teachers face difficulties in understanding the transferred knowledge. AN believes that educational goals cannot be fully achieved because some students do not concentrate in class. Students are busy talking and doing other things which disrupts the teaching process when the teacher explains something about the topic. As a result, teachers had to stop and give punishment to students according to mutual agreement at the beginning of the semester. According to (Khajloo, 2013), students must concentrate on learning English if they want to do their best and get good grades.

b. Teacher's Side. The challenges in teaching English also come from the teacher's side. From the teacher's perspective, the challenges of teaching English are due to limited knowledge and mastery of teaching method. The challenges in teaching English also come from the teacher's side. From the teacher's perspective, the challenges of teaching English are due to limited knowledge and mastery of teaching. AN stated that his background as a teacher was very lacking because she was not a graduate of an education study program, but literature. To create a learning implementation plan is still need to learn and still don't understand the teaching right methods for students. So, mastery of teaching skills is still not

good enough and needs improvement. Applying various teaching methods and techniques is difficult because teachers are unable to do so. Teachers not only focus on how to transfer the four language skills, but also how to maintain students' motivation and enthusiasm in learning and practicing English (Ansari, 2012).

- c. **Facility's side.** The school facilities provided do not support English language teaching at school. AN stated *"Devices such as LCD projectors, sound systems, and computers are very necessary for the process of teaching English, especially when training students to listen. All teachers are only provided with one sound system which is used interchangeably. Sometimes because it's difficult to store items, I choose to just use a textbook."* "It is a challenge for teaching English that a large number of students requires large resources." (Ajibola, 2010) states that it is very difficult to ensure that textbooks, computers, hearing aids, hands-on practice tools and other teaching instruments are available.

The Solution Implemented

a. **Provide motivational feedback**

The way to increase students' enthusiasm in learning English is to provide feedback in the form of motivation. participants often do this. AN said, *"...regarding students' interest in English, I continue to advise them to continue learning because English will be useful for their communication skills in the future, both for continuing their education and their careers. Then, for students who do not actively participate in class, I always try to make an agreement on what kind of learning method will make students feel more comfortable and enjoyable in class."* According (Connellan, 2002) quoted from (Sarsar, 2014). One of the most effective types of feedback is motivational feedback Many studies have focused on this feedback as a powerful tool to boost student motivation and keep them motivated (Kim & Keller, 2008).

b. **Apply various teaching methods and techniques**

Participants use a variety of teaching approaches in class. According to (Fatiloro, 2015), "in dealing with English language teaching problems, teachers must use various methods in teaching English", participant said often uses flashcards and role plays in the classroom because "students often feel more interested in pictures and photos" (Mishra, 2015). Teachers are advised to use role playing activities to increase students' motivation and help students who are not interested to participate in activities to increase students' vocabulary. Apart from that, participants applied techniques where teachers did not just teach vocabulary to students textually but connected it to the children's world. Teachers often invite students to make short conversations using the basic English they have learned to train students' pronunciation and creative thinking about something. Additionally, the Virginia Department of Education (2006) quoted from (Mumary Songbatumis, 2017) states that classroom management can help students understand English. Regarding this, participants asked students to break the ice by singing an English song or by clapping happily. So that students' concentration can be restored.

c. **Teacher self-reflection**

Reflection is a process of critical thinking about experiences that makes someone realize mistakes and look for solutions. According to (Christodoulou, 2010), self-reflection and self-evaluation are the most important aspects of teaching. They also include important teaching skills. AN said that the teaching methods used by teachers influence students' interest in English. *"I think students are very dependent on my teaching methods and the techniques I use are quite effective, but the fact is that I still have to improve my mastery of teaching methods. I try to discuss with other subject teachers about the character-*

istics of students who sometimes in English class are silent, but when in other classes they appear active. From there, I learned that each student likes different teaching methods and techniques. " Personal reflection helps teachers become more aware of the way they teach, which helps them interact with students well (Rahman, 2014). AN added "An effort to improve my own abilities is my participation as a school representative to take part in teacher capacity development training, both held at school and in the service." (Cendana, 2020) states that personal reflection not only improves teacher teaching but also improves student learning outcomes.

d. Utilize available resources and facilities.

Participants said that to overcome this shortage, teacher continue to maximize existing resources such as books, whiteboards, desk chairs and markers in the classroom as a means of learning English. *"I maximize books and whiteboards to explain the material that day. To introduce pictures and names of animals, I often print my own flashcards as learning media."* According to (Mishra, 2015) states that "rural areas lack the required atmosphere, teachers can take advantage of easily available resources."

CONCLUSION

This research found many problems in teaching English at Muhammadiyah Jogokariyan Elementary School. As this research shows, a lack of understanding of teaching methods, and inadequate facilities are all challenges faced by teachers. Additional challenges that come from students include lack of enthusiasm, low concentration, and low vocabulary. Lastly, the challenge that arises comes from the lack of providing adequate school facilities for teaching English in the classroom. This makes it difficult for all teachers to teach English without supporting media.

The study also discovered how research participants dealt with the issue. Participants have a unique way of dealing with teaching problems at the Muhammadiyah Jogokariyan Elementary School, namely that the teacher makes efforts to increase teacher resources by participating in teacher training both held at school and in the official department. Teachers also use a variety of teaching methods and techniques, maximize all available resources, provide motivating feedback, and engage in self-reflection.

However, readers should evaluate the results of this study. The results of this research cannot be generalized because they show problems in teaching English at the Muhammadiyah Jogokariyan Elementary School. Even in other schools it is possible for English teachers to face different problems. Therefore, research can be used by teachers in the teaching process or not, depending on the reader's real environment. Additionally, the limitations of the current study's participants may have influenced the findings in that the researchers were unable to look into teachers' broad perspectives. Additionally, future research on English language teaching issues may benefit from placing attention on students' varying attitudes in the classroom and what they learn. This shows that there is a trend that needs to be researched further.

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