

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY DEVELOPMENT AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Imro Atus Soliha, Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Muhammadiyah Probolinggo

e-mail: imroatussoliha214@gmail.com

Yulina Fadilah, Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Muhammadiyah Probolinggo

e-mail: yulinafadilah@gmail.com

Pratiwi Dwi Warih Sitaresmi, Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Muhammadiyah Probolinggo

e-mail: pratiwidws23.math@gmail.com

Abstract

This research delves into the complexities of English language instruction at the primary school level in Probolinggo, where English proficiency is crucial in the global context. Despite the importance of English education, challenges persist, including a shortage of trained teachers and unique characteristics of primary education. Employing a qualitative approach, this study presents insights obtained through expert interviews, focus group discussions, and content analysis of relevant literature. The findings emphasize the need for engaging, interactive teaching materials that integrate various language skills and capture students' attention. Although the English language program has proven effective, challenges arise in classroom implementation due to resource constraints and teacher limitations. To address these challenges, greater involvement from schools and the community is sought. This research aims to inform strategies for enhancing English language instruction at the primary school level in Probolinggo.

Keywords: English Language Proficiency, Challenges, Solutions

INTRODUCTION

Teaching of English language in Indonesia began after the country gained independence. Efforts to develop English language curriculum and teaching methods at the primary school (SD) level are crucial steps in enhancing students' proficiency in mastering the English language. However, despite numerous efforts, the

expected outcomes of English language instruction have not been fully realized. Several issues and factors have emerged, affecting students' ability to communicate effectively in English.

English language proficiency is considered a fundamental skill in the era of globalization. English serves as the primary means of introducing students to the realm of knowledge and

technology and provides access to various international sources of information. Therefore, the need for English language mastery has become increasingly urgent, and the end ever to facilitate English language instruction at the primary school level is highly relevant.

Although there have been efforts to integrate English into the primary school curriculum, it is important to note that this provision is not always supported by an adequate number of trained English teachers. Teaching English at the primary school level has unique characteristics that differ from higher levels of education, necessitating specialized approaches and instructors capable of meeting the specific needs of primary school students.

To address these challenges, in-depth and comprehensive research on the English language teaching process at the primary school level is essential. Such research can provide a clear and deep understanding of the various factors that influence English language instruction at the primary school level, including teaching methods, curriculum, available resources, and barriers encountered.

In line with these developments, this research aims to make a meaningful contribution to the implementation of specialized educational programs capable of producing competent English teachers for the primary school level. Thus, it is expected that English language

instruction at the primary school level can become more effective, meeting the needs and characteristics of students at this educational level.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative methodology, which aims to describe and elucidate the issues and solutions related to English language teaching in primary schools. The approach in describing and elucidating this data is through the perspectives of various experts in the field. By utilizing a qualitative approach, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues and solutions concerning English language instruction at the primary school level.

Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring complex issues in depth and capturing the nuances of human experiences and perspectives. In this study, a qualitative approach allows for a rich exploration of the multifaceted challenges and potential solutions in the context of primary school English language instruction.

The qualitative methodology in this research involves data collection through methods such as expert interviews, focus group discussions, and content analysis of relevant literature and documents. The insights gathered from these sources will be carefully analyzed, allowing for a deeper understanding of the complexities of the issues and the

potential solutions that can address them effectively.

By employing qualitative research, this study seeks to uncover valuable insights, opinions, and expert knowledge that can contribute to a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the challenges and remedies related to English language teaching in primary schools. This in-depth exploration will ultimately facilitate the development of more effective strategies and approaches to enhance English language instruction at the primary school level.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the respondents suggest a conclusion that English teaching materials in elementary schools should be joyful and interactive. Therefore, the content and methods employed should align with students' developmental stages. Teachers expressed that they could use songs, puzzles, games, and engaging visuals during the teaching process. Hence, it is the duty of teachers to select games suitable for students based on their cognitive, physical, and emotional levels. The data also indicates that teachers believe students' textbooks should be colorful to capture students' attention and motivation. Greene and Petty (1967) strongly support this view, stating that colorful and interactive images capture students' interest and curiosity, thereby increasing their

motivation to learn further. It is also noted that students find it easier to memorize vocabulary when they see something captivating. According to Frost (1967), young learners' minds are highly engaged when they see. Teaching Writing, Reading, Speaking, and Listening Should Be Integrated

The data obtained suggests that teaching English language skills, including writing, reading, speaking, and listening, should be integrated.

Objectives of Teaching English in Elementary Schools

The introduction of the English language in elementary schools is of great importance. There are several reasons behind the necessity of continuing this program. Firstly, English is a highly significant language in the international arena, especially in the current era of globalization. It serves as a means of communication with people from various countries. According to Crystal (2003), English is spoken and used by nearly a quarter of the world's population, and this number is expected to grow to one and a half billion by the early 2000s. Secondly, mastering English enables individuals to easily access information and technology. By introducing English in elementary schools, students become acquainted with the language at an early stage, providing them with a stronger foundation before advancing to higher levels of education.

English Language Instruction Is Based on the Curriculum

The curriculum is regarded as a crucial component of the English language instruction process (Erdoan et al., 2009). The English language curriculum includes various plans, objectives, teaching materials, and evaluation tools to support the teaching process. English language instruction in elementary schools aims to facilitate the absorption, development of knowledge, technology, arts, and cultural understanding, as well as the establishment of relationships with other countries (Nurhamidah et al., 2017), targeting elementary students as the first learners of a foreign language (Maili, 2018).

Primary Focus of English Language Instruction

The primary reason for teaching English in elementary schools is to provide students with extensive vocabulary and word mastery. Consequently, the primary focus of English language instruction, as indicated by the respondents, is vocabulary acquisition, especially in conversational contexts that are beginning to be neglected. Proficiency in a rich vocabulary makes it easier for students to acquire other language skills.

Professional Competence

From the data obtained, teachers express confidence in their

qualifications and professional skills to teach English in elementary schools. Respondents generally hold educational qualifications in the English language and have undergone training and language courses. It is essential, as stated by Brook (1967), for an elementary school English teacher to be proficient in the English language or have received training to teach students. However, the researcher believes that there is room for improvement, particularly in understanding the habits of children when learning a foreign language. Therefore, workshops and further training are still necessary for them. On the other hand, attention from the government, schools, and the community needs to be increased, especially concerning the status of honorary teachers, to ensure the smooth running of this program.

Classroom Teaching Implementation

The data reveals that the respondents generally face issues with classroom teaching implementation. They all hope for a pleasant teaching atmosphere, but the reality falls short of their expectations. Ideally, the number of students in language classes should be limited. However, classrooms often accommodate 36 or more students, far from an ideal setting. Nonetheless, this issue can be addressed by dividing students into several groups or assigning them to work in pairs, as suggested by Johnson (1994), who

points out three advantages of group work: creating interaction among students, changing students' individual work culture into teamwork, and providing a more varied atmosphere to showcase students' abilities. Students hope for more individual attention, given their young age. The availability of textbooks for both teachers and students is another factor contributing to the program's success. The data indicates that all teachers use textbooks as their teaching guide. However, some teachers face challenges due to the limited availability of textbooks. Not all students possess textbooks, forcing them to share with their peers. In other observed schools, the availability of textbooks was limited to high-quality private schools. This problem is further compounded by teachers not having guidelines for selecting books that meet the necessary standards to be used as teaching materials in the classroom.

Classroom Layout and Seating Arrangement

Proper classroom layout and seating arrangements are also crucial factors. In traditional classrooms, students often sit in rows, and the teacher delivers lessons at the front of the class. However, this traditional setup may not yield optimal results. Thus, schools and communities should cooperate to provide quality classroom facilities to ensure smooth student activities. Dunn (1983) notes that

classroom seating and desk arrangements should be configured to facilitate interaction between students and between students and the teacher.

School and Community Participation

The data generally indicates respondents' dissatisfaction with school and community participation. Teachers often state that schools should be responsible for providing teaching equipment and facilities. They often have to take on additional responsibilities beyond teaching. On the other hand, teachers might stop teaching if students receive more promising offers elsewhere. In such cases, the program's continuity becomes uncertain.

Another issue is the lack of teaching media. Teachers must prepare their teaching materials, indirectly increasing their own expenses. Nevertheless, teachers take joy in teaching their students. It is actually the responsibility of the school to provide an ideal teaching environment. Other deficiencies include the absence of a language laboratory, which is lacking, and a standard library in elementary schools.

When the respondents were asked whether they emphasize an integrated language proficiency approach during classroom teaching or focus on specific aspects, the data obtained showed varying opinions. The researcher believes these differences

stem from the limited teaching materials and methods available to the respondents.

Generally, teachers believe that the emphasis on teaching materials should be limited to specific aspects due to the limited time available and the large number of students. However, based on focusing on students' proficiency in specific aspects might not yield optimal results. As Green and Pretty (1967) have pointed out, language learning objectives should encompass all language skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data collected and discussed in the previous sections, four main conclusions can be drawn. First, teachers believe that providing quality teaching materials can have a positive impact on students. Teachers argue that students will be more inclined to learn and motivated if the materials taught relate to their everyday lives, such as time, seasons, school and household items. Furthermore, the use of materials that make learning joyful and interactive, such as songs, riddles, storytelling, and images, contributes to this. Second, the implementation of the English language teaching program in elementary schools is very effective as an introduction to a foreign language before students proceed to higher education. However, due to the limited number of respondents available for interviews, the researcher cannot make

generalizations about this. Most issues arise in the classroom teaching process. There are two main reasons for these problems. The first is the teachers' shortcomings in handling classroom issues, and the second is the limited resources provided by the schools. Therefore, teachers feel that the involvement of schools and the community has not been very helpful in the program's implementation. Thus, teachers hope for more involvement from the school and the community, especially parents, to ensure the success of the English language teaching program by providing adequate resources and facilities for teachers.

RECOMMENDATION

The implementation of this program has encountered many obstacles, it is believed that English language teaching for elementary school students will continue if certain improvements and enhancements are made. First and foremost, there is a need to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills in handling classrooms and young students, despite most of them having good qualifications. Furthermore, teachers should employ more appropriate teaching media in their teaching process. Therefore, increased participation from schools and the community, especially parents, in providing teaching media and foreign language learning facilities in schools is highly anticipated. Lastly, it would be

beneficial to expand this research on a larger scale so that we can gain a more accurate understanding of English language teaching.

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