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## Identifying and addressing challenges in teaching English at SDN Mangunsari

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### A B S T R A C T

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English language teaching in primary schools provides an important basis for students' language development. The development of English language skills in elementary school students is important. The primary goal of this study was to explore the challenges that teachers face when teaching English at SDN Mangunsari. The qualitative method was used in this study to identify and classify the specifics of challenges in teaching English. The researchers gather the data through a observation to identify and address challenges faced by teachers when teaching English at SDN Mangunsari. The collected data will be analyzed using the descriptive analysis method. The difficulties in teaching English at SDN Mangunsari include curriculum transitions, gaps generated by students of different ages within the same grade, and inconsistency caused by a lack of alignment between teaching and assessment. To overcome the challenges found at SDN Mangunsari when teaching English, transition English classes, cooperative learning, and consistent English teaching in all grades must be implemented. These strategies attempt to create a suitable learning environment and to make the English language topic more accessible at SDN Mangunsari.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

English language teaching in primary schools is a critical basis for students' language development. English language development for elementary school students is very important, especially for students whose primary language is a language other than English. The importance of English teaching also highlighted in the current Curriculum. The official status of English in the curriculum indicates how important it is to study the language in primary school (Qi, 2016). Teaching English in primary schools not only improves basic communication skills, but it also creates a solid foundation for overall language competence. Another study shows the advantages of teaching English in primary schools, such as the development of basic communication skills (Cahyati & Madya, 2019). Facilitating English language acquisition among primary school children by focusing on consistent practice, thus focusing on the important aspect of English learning at an early age. An innovative digital platform known as "An English Island®" was created by British School Pistoia Srl to provide practical support for teaching children to speak English through continuous practice, emphasizing the significance of English learning in primary school (Palladino et al., 2022). Besides, WhatsApp-assisted can be implemented in primary

school as language learning application, specifically in rural area in terms of the technical and educational reason (Fitriana, 2022). Learning English at an early age has been linked to improving children's problem-solving, creativity and critical thinking skills. English language teaching in primary schools contributes greatly to students' language development by focusing on vocabulary development and comprehensive language proficiency. Thus, word recognition instruction and visual aids can be used to enhance primary ESL learners (Chai et al., 2021).

The government has implemented a set of regulations and recommendations to enhance the quality of foreign language acquisition during the initial phase of education, specifically in the context of English language instruction at the primary school level. According to Government Decree Number 28/H/KU/2021, English language teaching is broken down into stages and includes certain goals that must be reached. The initial phase is Phase A, which is primarily intended for students in grades I and II. At the end of phase, A, students gain knowledge that spoken English facilitates their ability to participate in social interactions. Phase B, mainly intended for students in grades III and IV, focuses on developing the ability to understand and respond to simple spoken and visual English materials. The final phase, Phase C, is mainly intended for students in grades V and VI. By the end of Phase C, learners have the ability to understand and respond to simple spoken, written, and visual English texts. The importance of English language learning during the primary school phase is pointed out in Government Decree Number 28/H/KU/2021. This decree shows the importance of English learning and defines certain learning objectives that must be achieved throughout this school phase. It indicates the importance of English language learning in primary schools.

However, English language education can be hindered by many kinds of potential challenges. Inconsistency in the curriculum is one of the challenges of teaching English at the elementary school level. Curriculum inconsistency can make it difficult for teachers to plan and deliver effective teaching of the English language. In education, a lack of clear guidelines on what to teach and how to teach it can lead to confusion and inconsistency (Cahyati & Madya, 2019). Furthermore, the lack of a standardized curriculum can make assessing students' progress and ensuring that they are meeting learning objectives difficult (Straková, 2015). Another problem that may occur is the shortage of trained English Teachers. English is frequently introduced as an optional in primary school without consideration for who will teach it. Most primary school teachers lack specific education in English teaching, which creates challenges for ELT courses (MUTLU, 2017). As a result, teachers may find themselves teaching English in general or teaching English to young learners in particular without appropriate training (Copland et al., 2014). In elementary school English classes, a shortage of course hours and supplies hinders learning activities. These challenges, which include a lack of trained English teachers and inadequate teaching materials, contribute to the challenges that teachers face while providing effective English language education at the primary school level.

Nunan (2010) identifies five major challenges that English teachers of young students may face. These difficulties relate to assessment, multilevel groups, motivation, attention, and cognitive development. The development of cognition is the first challenge. According to Nunan, young learners are halfway through the stages of their social and psychological development that span from childhood to adulthood. Teachers should take this type of thing into careful consideration when creating assignments and materials. The second issue that young learners' English teachers may encounter is motivation. Getting the students' attention is the next difficulties. Given that students have short attention spans, teachers should be able to focus on

getting students' attention before anything else. Teaching English to young learners presents another challenge in terms of multi-level groups. Teachers therefore need to be equipped to work with students who have those kinds of differences. The final one relates to assessment. According to Nunan, assessments are necessary to determine how well students have performed, but since they are an essential component of learning, the assessment for the learning process is the most crucial one.

To sum up everything that has been stated so far, teaching English in primary school is important for students who do not speak English as their first language to learn a new language, improve communication skills, and develop full language proficiency. This study will contribute to understanding on how to address the challenges identified in teaching English at SDN Mangunsari. In previous study, as in Pertiwi et al (2022) study on challenges in teaching English on young learner, has explored the difficulties encountered during teaching English in primary level. However, in this study, the author aims to not only identify the challenges, but also to propose a way to address these issues. By identifying and addressing the challenges faced by English teachers, this research is expected to make a contribution to the development of more effective English language teaching at SDN Mangunsari that located in Windusari, Magelang, Central Java. The primary goal of this study was to explore the challenges that teachers face when teaching English at SDN Mangunsari.

## **2. METHOD**

The qualitative method was used in this study to identify the specifics of challenges in teaching English at SDN Mangunsari. This method allows for full research, providing a full understanding of the challenges that teachers face. Many researches have shown the difficulties in teaching English, particularly to young students, as well as the potential of qualitative research for addressing these challenges. Pertiwi et al., (2022) and Copland et al., (2014) identified and investigated these obstacles, which included non-English prior knowledge, a lack of wants, and an unpleasant classroom setting, using qualitative methodologies. Wang (2018) and Weinberger (2018) emphasize the value of qualitative research in the field of English language teaching and learning, noting its capacity to capture the challenges of educational contexts.

Using observation as the primary instrument to capture actual challenges encountered while teaching English. Several researchers use observation as an important instrument to capture the challenges encountered when teaching English. Novice and student teachers experienced challenges such as culture shock, huge classes, and a lack of resources (Foncha et al., 2015). Pertiwi et al. (2020) noted the challenges of controlling the classroom environment and using suitable teaching strategies, especially for young learners. Deocampo (2020) identified challenges among novice teachers such as classroom management, teaching methods, and English communication difficulties. These studies show the importance of observation in understanding the real challenges of teaching English. All of the data will be directly taken at SDN Mangunsari. The informants being observed were 57 school participants including teachers and students. The observation was conducted in the classroom setting during learning activity.

In analyzing the data, the researcher used descriptive analysis to analysis the data collected through observation to reach the research aim. An important way for understanding and summarizing observational data is descriptive analysis (Dominik, 2013). The researcher used this method of analysis to carefully identify and classify the challenges faced in the teaching of

English at SDN Mangunsari. This research aims is to discover detailed understanding of these challenges through the use of qualitative methods and descriptive analysis.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 Results**

Observations at SDN Mangunsari discovered many notable challenges towards successful English language teaching:

##### **3.1.1 Curriculum Change/Transition**

Observations at SDN Mangunsari show an important challenge in the English language course, which is mainly limited to grades 4, 5, and 6. This limitation in English language education could be the result of the school's ongoing curriculum transition or adaption phase to the Kurikulum Merdeka. As a result of this there were lack of English language teaching in grades 1, 2, and 3 seems to be associated with the curriculum's transitional time. The change may be related to changes in educational principles or teaching methods, which may have an impact on the implementation of English teaching in lower grades. Teachers moving students from absence of English subject classrooms and to the English subject held in higher grades (Class 4,5,6) may face difficulties when handling students' different levels of language proficiency.

##### **3.1.2 Mismatched Student Ages in Classes**

Observation conducted in SDN Mangunsari also showed other important problem caused by the age gap between students and their placement in class. This inconsistency raises several issues *Differences in comprehension growth*

It was discovered that there was a gap between students' ages in each grade, for example in grade 4, there was a student who should already in grade 6 or student in grade 5 but it should be in lower grade . It indicates the potential of developmental gaps. Younger children put in higher English grades may struggle to understand the lessons designed for older students. Older students in lower-level class, on the other hand, may find the material too simple, restricting their engagement and development.

##### *Teaching Difficulties*

Teachers have to deal with all of the levels of development within a single class. It is a serious educational problem that requires customized training to match various requirements, language proficiency levels, and intellectual abilities of children at different developmental stages. Mismatched student placements in each grade may cause students to feel incompetent or discouraged. Younger students who suffer with difficult subject may lack confidence, and motivation while older students who are placed in lower-level classrooms may feel demotivated or disinterested following the material given by the teacher.

##### **3.1.3 Uncertainty in English Language Teaching**

At SDN Mangunsari, observations showed an important gap between the inconsistent aspect of English teaching and the evaluation demands during mid and final semester exams. Despite having no or limited availability of English language learning because of the curriculum's transitional period to Kurikulum Merdeka that English is a must subject especially in grade 3 or higher, English subject is assessed for students of grade 3 or higher during assessments.

### *Inconsistency in English Teaching*

Due to going on curriculum transitions, there is a lack of consistency in English language teaching, which is particularly visible in grades 1, 2, and 3. Students' learning experiences have been limited as a result of the lack of a structured and consistent English lesson through these early grade levels. This inconsistency in English language teaching hinders students of a regular integrated language learning experience, limiting their growth of basic language skills. Students missing the required materials for learning a language if they do not get regular English lessons on a regular basis.

### *Confusion and Unpreparedness*

During exam periods, students experience confusion and a sense of being unprepared. The difference between student's absence from to English language teaching, especially for grades 3 or higher, and the unanticipated assessment requirements have resulted in noticeable student's inability. They are unprepared to answer examination questions in a subject they have not regularly learned. As a result of the mismatch between what is examined and what is taught, students confidence levels have dropped significantly. This continuous lack of preparation results in poor performance during exams, as students struggle to successfully have their English language skills, resulting to impact their academic outcomes.

### *Language Skill Acquisition Difficulties*

At SDN Mangunsari indicated significant challenges related to inconsistent English interaction, they rarely have English as subject in class and they also rarely in touch with English language. The irregularity of regular English classes has resulted in an important challenge for maintaining achieved language proficiency. Due to a limited number of lessons, students have fewer chances to practice and enhance their English skills, reducing their ability to strengthen their understanding of language through regular practice of speaking, reading, writing, and listening. This little contact to English results to a unclear learning experience, reducing development of English language skills and limiting students ability to learn English as Foreign language. As a result, it affects their general English language proficiency growth in using the language.

## **Additional Information from Direct Observation of Teachers and Students**

### *Curriculum Adaptation Challenges*

Based on the observation, the curriculum at SDN Mangunsari is still in transitional phase, which is a challenge for teachers. English learning subjects are restricted to certain grade levels, specifically grades 4, 5, and 6. As a result, teachers are faced with the difficult task of accommodating students of various ages within these designated sessions. The demanded curriculum does not effectively match the grades in this primary school, which forces teachers to have difficulty with adapting their teaching methods to address this mismatch.

### *Pressure and lack of Support*

Teachers at SDN Mangunsari had significant pressure when faced with conducting a new curriculum in the lack of proper training or support procedures. The lack of teacher training and the inability of teachers at SDN Mangunsari who can properly teach English. As a result, teachers are struggling to adapt their teaching methods, correlate with new learning goals, and effectively deliver English lessons to students.

Furthermore, a lack of resources, such as textbooks, additional resources, and technology, limits teachers' capacity to implement teaching methods. This shortcoming limits their ability to

accommodate students' various learning styles and skill levels. The lack of suitable materials for different class levels limits the development of an appropriate classroom, preventing students from receiving English language learning.

The information on student were also acquired by observation. There was a distinct conflict between their little knowledge of the English language in regular classes and there are exams that the materials are not even taught during mid and final semester exams. The difference ended up resulting in confusion and unpreparedness among students when faced with English tests.

The gap between their regular teaching and the unexpected examination demands shows quite a challenge for students in SDN Mangunsari where English language teaching are rare or non-existent. They are unprepared to understand the topics assessed in tests due to their rare encounter with English language lessons. As a result, their ability to perform effectively is hindered during assessment times.

The sudden introduction of English as a core subject beginning in grade 3 offers a significant trouble for students at SDN Mangunsari. This urgent introduction represents an important change in the classes, requiring students to quickly adjust to a language that they had barely or occasionally encounter to in their previous years of schooling.

## 3.2 Discussions

### 3.2.1 Curriculum Transition Challenges

The transition phase of the curriculum at SDN Mangunsari poses as major challenges, especially the limitations of English language teaching in grades 1, 2, and 3. Both students and teachers are impacted by the lack of regular English learning during these necessary early years. This imbalance has been caused by changes in educational concepts or curriculum, from K-13 to Kurikulum Merdeka in short range, resulting in an unbalanced learning environment in which students in higher grades have different levels of English language ability. The difference creates significant difficulties for both teaching and learning activities. The limitation of English learning in certain grade levels creates plenty of significant challenges for both teachers and students. Students in grades 1-3 may have different levels of English language knowledge than those in higher grades, which may affect their English language improvement and knowledge levels. Early knowledge of English language learning, particularly in elementary school, is important for creating a strong foundation for developing language and communication abilities. The absence of proper English teaching during these early ages could hinder overall English language proficiency.

Problems encountered:

#### 1. Language Proficiency Differences

Because there is no regulated English language learning in the lower grades, students' proficiency levels vary, making it difficult for teachers to give compatible lessons.

#### 2. Inconsistency in Learning Basis

Students in lower grades lack basic English language skills, which interfere with their ability to understand and engage in higher-level English lessons.

#### *Solutions and implementation*

Several strategic strategies could be carried out for addressing these difficulties. First, the implementation of set up transitional English language lesson that teach basic English lessons starting in the early grades may encourage a steady and cohesive language development. For students learning English, providing transitional English language sessions in the early grades can

significantly improve literacy competence (Baker et al., 2016). The use of innovative materials and strategies, such as vocabulary improvement, is important when teaching young learners in English vocabulary (Syafrizal & Haerudin, 2018). Students' vocabulary improvement can be enhanced by using application namely Monkey Stories (Syahria & Azzaria, 2023) Quizizz (Fadhilah & Anggrisia, 2023) and picture cards (Octaberlina & Anggarini, 2020). Also, learning method through games and songs can support young learners (Octaberlina, 2023).

Second, providing teacher training focused on different teaching methods would give teachers with the resources they need to effectively deal with different language proficiency levels in one class. Various studies have stated the importance of appropriate teacher training in addressing different language skill levels in English as a foreign language. Rao (2019) indicates the importance for teachers to understand students' requirements and use a variety of strategies to enhance language proficiency. In order to improve the language-learning process for their students, teachers with limited proficiency in the target language must keep expanding their field of knowledge (Richards et al., 2013).

Furthermore, regular feedback, together with specific feedback methods, may assist in develop targeted teaching methods, while additional assistance procedures, such as after-school tutoring or language learning programmes, can help students who are struggling with English language. According to Maawa and Cruz (2019), implementing regular evaluation and implementing specific feedback strategies, such as peer assistance and direct correction, have been proven to enhance students' competency in the English language. Widiastuti (2021) suggests that in the EFL classroom, adopting various evaluation techniques and providing frequent verbal and written feedback can effectively improve students' academic performance.

### 3.2.2 Mismatched Student Ages in Grades

The age differences observed within each grade level at SDN Mangunsari result in noticeable differences in growth. In situations such as grade 4, where students span several ages. Younger students enrolled in higher grade may encounter problems in understanding materials designed for older students, whereas older students placed in lower-level programmes may perceive the content as too basic, leading to a decrease in their level of interest. The imbalance between students' language competency and their intellectual abilities presents great educational challenges, requiring teachers to develop lessons in order to adjust to each student's needs. As a result, the unequal distribution of students in different grades affects the intended learning results, possibly limiting the learning of language proficiency and overall competence. This imbalance also has long-term effects on the language development of younger students in higher-level classes and older students in lower-level classes.

#### *Effect on Learning Outcomes*

Differences between the ages of students and their class levels can result in serious imbalances in learning outcomes. Younger students enrolled in higher-level class or older students put in lower classes might have difficulties in achieving expected educational goals. Differences in the placement may hinder the learning of important proficiency in languages. Younger students might not have sufficient intellectual preparation for complicated languages, while older students may encounter difficulties in learning necessary language skills as a result of being assigned to lower-level classes. The difference might hinder the development of language proficiency. Students may lack enough language experience or training that is appropriate for their stage of development, which can hinder their capacity to acquire comprehensive proficiency in languages. Differences

in placement have a chance to significantly affect the long-term language growth of students. Limited progress or limited access to appropriate language teaching may result in limitations in language skills that could endure through later educational phases.

#### *Solutions and implementation*

Facilitating peer learning and collaborative activities might promote an inclusive classroom environment, enabling students to benefit from their skills alongside one another. Enabling cooperative learning and peer-to-peer learning may help to create an inclusive learning environment in the classroom (Lo and Monge, 2013). Facilitating the collaboration between older and younger students for language-based activities creates collaborative learning and understanding of English language acquisition. Mohamed et al. (2019) provides more information to support this claim, showing the positive impacts of collaborative learning on language learning, such as reduced nervousness and increased confidence. By using this method, older students promote their own understanding by explaining subjects to their younger classmates, so deepening their understanding. At the same time, younger students obtain important guidance, increasing their understanding through collaboration with classmates.

### **3.2.3 Uncertainty in English Language Teaching**

The nuances in the teaching of English at SDN Mangunsari, caused by changes in the curriculum, create important challenges, particularly in grades 1, 2, and 3. The existence of these shortcomings limits the students' ability to have regulated English subject, which in effect hinders their English language learning processes that are important to developing basic English language skills. The challenges include a lack of sufficient opportunities which restrict the acquisition of language skills in terms of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Furthermore, the mismatch between inconsistent teaching and assessments of English subject creates confusion during exams, reducing the confidence of students and quite affecting their academic achievement.

Students face significant difficulty going through this new subject. The absence of regular English teaching in previous grades results in a great imbalance in language skills, restricting their ability to successfully comprehend important subjects. As a result, students are faced with necessary language elements including learning vocabulary to basic grammatical rules, which may hinder their overall comprehension and competency development

#### *Solutions and implementation*

Implementing regular and consistent English lessons across all grade levels, with a particular focus on grades 1, 2, and 3, can greatly improve student ability to learn and develop their language skills. If it is not possible to avoid the class schedule due to a shortage of available class hours, then it can be done to set aside special class time. English classes are still held outside of regular class hours, even if it is only for a little period. This method may assist students in learning proficiency in English that are rarely or not taught at certain grade levels. Fiani et al. (2021) indicates the need of effective class scheduling to maximize learning. Extracurricular can also be applied without disrupting the schedule for general subject. Kardiansyah and Qodriani (2018) indicates that extracurricular activities are important for improving students' language skills, especially when it comes to speaking English. Teachers believe that extracurricular activities help students grow academically and in language while also increasing their enthusiasm and involvement (Ginosyan et al., 2019). These methods can assist students in overcoming the limitations of classroom time and improving their English proficiency.



Alternatively, English courses can be integrated into the lessons with other subjects, allowing for the teaching of many subjects within the designated schedule while at the same time integrating English language skills without affecting the duration of the lessons. Studies have indicated that the methods used to teach English can be effectively applied to other topics, such as Islamic studies (Hussain, 2020). For students who do not speak native English, this combination can be very helpful as it helps them get ready for more English-language learning (Vavelyuk 2015).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The study of the challenges encountered when teaching English at SDN Mangunsari shows a several things affecting both teachers and students. The challenges in teaching English language in SDN Mangunsari are difficulties during curriculum transitions, gaps caused by students of different ages within the same grade, and inconsistency resulting from the lack of coordination between teaching and assessment. A number of suggested strategies have been stated. There is a significant need for transitional English classes in lower grades for developing basic proficiency in the language. Addressing the gaps in class that occur due to differences in age can be properly addressed by implementing activities that motivate interaction among classmates and collaborative learning. Added to that, suggesting to implement standard English lessons across all grade levels is an important change. If there are any limitations on scheduling, it is recommended to create additional time for English lessons or integrate English into other subject lessons. To address the problems found at SDN Mangunsari when teaching English, it is necessary to implement transition English classes, create collaboration learning, and maintain consistent English teaching in all grades. These strategies aim establish a desirable learning environment and facilitate the English language subject at SDN Mangunsari.

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