

## ENGLISH TEACHING STRATEGIES OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AT PEKALONGAN

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**Abstract:** English has been introduced in elementary schools in Indonesia for many years. However, English is only regarded as optional or additional subject. With the status of English only as an additional subject, the teaching of English in elementary schools is frequently done by the class teachers who have no English language education background. To see how non-English background teachers actually teach English, this study examined the strategies used and challenges experienced by teachers who were teaching English without any English teaching background in elementary schools in Pekalongan Regency, Central Java. The writers used a questionnaire and interviews to collect the data from five teachers. The findings showed that the teachers in this study had no specific strategies for teaching English. They also had no initiative to develop any teaching media. Further, these teachers perceived their poor English, the students' poor English ability and the poor school facilities as the biggest challenges in teaching English. The findings suggest that trainings need to be given to help these teachers develop strategies and media for teaching English.

**Keywords:** *elementary school, challenges, elementary school, English, English strategies*

English has been introduced in kindergarten and elementary schools in Indonesia for many years. In elementary schools particularly, the introduction of English has been supported by the decree of Minister Education and Culture issued in 1992 in which schools are given the permit to introduce English in elementary schools in condition that it does not interrupt the attainment of national education goals. In 2025, after thirty-three years of the issue of that decree, English is still regarded as an additional or local content (Sulistiyono, et al., 2019; Primary et al, 2023) or elective subject (Kemendikbudristek, 2022), suggesting that English has not received any different status in elementary school curriculum.

With the status of English only as an additional subject, the teaching of English in elementary schools is frequently done by the class teachers who have no English Language Education Background. As a result, many students are taught by teachers who have limited English skills (Falah, Apsari, Kusumah, 2023) who also often face difficulties in developing the materials (Yusrina, Setyaningsih, Putra, 2025). Ideally, teaching English involves teaching students basic language skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing in addition to helping them internalize English language elements like grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation (Yastiani et al., 2025). The Indonesian government also highlights that the goals of English teaching is to help students become more proficient communicators (Indri & Handayani, 2017). The primary objective of teaching English is also to foster and increase students' enthusiasm for the language (Octaberlina, 2023), and with this objectives, English teachers need to have a good learning English technique (Astika, 2020). Unfortunately, without English background, it is unlikely that the way the teachers teach English to elementary school students is optimum.

The limited number of English teachers with English education background in elementary schools has become a particular concern since it affects the learning outcome of the students and also the quality of teaching and learning at schools. Efendi, Prihantini and Nurhidayah (2024) found that English subjects were taught by non-English teachers who mostly graduated with Elementary School Education Certificate. Efendi et al (2024) further found that the teaching of English was not conducted well in elementary schools. This situation is understandable as there many principles of teaching young learners which may not be fully understood by the teachers majoring in non-English education.

Among the principles of teaching young learners which are ideally implemented in English classrooms are creating fun and active learning, promoting collaboration in language practice, employing diverse thematic activities, presenting easy-to-understand materials, utilizing interactive approach for teaching vocabulary, presenting language and content in integration, respecting students' cultures, and giving clear objectives and



feedback (McCloskey, 2014). Teachers also need to be aware of the children's characteristics, emotional aspects, and interest in their cognitive development because it will undoubtedly have a big impact on how the young student participates in the learning process, responds, and achieves the lesson's goal (Mutiah et al., 2020). Similarly, Budiman et al. (2023) highlights that teachers need to present the information in an engaging way so that elementary school students will find it easier to understand what they are studying in English lesson.

In practice, not all teachers of English were successful in employing those principles above. In Bengkulu, West Sumatra, Nengsi et al. (2023) found that elementary school English teachers were able to teach English well because they mastered the English materials. They were also able to implement fun methods to make students master the material. However sometimes these teachers used Indonesian language in teaching English, resulting the lesson having less English atmosphere. In Gresik, East Java, teachers who taught English felt insecure as they had not mastered English grammar due to their non-English background and they felt that they need training for teaching English (Efendi, Prihantini & Hurhidayah, 2024). In Magelang, Central Java, the English teachers still had difficulty in teaching vocabulary because students had difficulties in memorizing new vocabulary and have issues in pronouncing the words (Pratama & Fatimah, 2024). In Bali, teachers with no-English background were found to have difficulties in conducting English class as they had no syllabus and lesson plan for teaching English and their students did not understand them when they spoke English (Puspitawati, et al., 2023). In other part of Central Java, teachers who had no English background were found to have difficulties in designing learning activities especially to make students active in the classrooms (Yusrina, Setyaningsih, & Putra, 2025). In addition, teachers were also found to have issues in managing their teaching time. Yusrina's et al. (2025) pointed that some teachers had issues in selecting the teaching strategies.

In fact one of the most important duties of teachers in creating a successful classroom is selecting effective teaching methods while enabling students to actively engage in their education (Nurhusliya and Saputra, 2024). Cahyaningrum (2023) argues that one of the most important things that can be done to assist students succeed better is to choose the appropriate language teaching strategies. However, as not all teachers teaching English in elementary schools have English Education Background, it is unlikely that they master the teaching techniques or strategies used for teaching English which are crucial to students' subject-matter proficiency.

The previous studies show that challenges in teaching elementary students are still faced by English teachers in Elementary schools in Indonesia. The issues revealed by the studies above are only some examples of issues faced by English teachers in Indonesian elementary schools. The writers believe that the issues are more complex since dealing with young learners are not always easy. Theoretically, children between the ages of seven and twelve are children with a sharp memory or in their golden age and thus according to Dewi et al., (2023) the greatest moment to begin teaching English is in elementary school. However, in practice, elementary school students are very active running and moving throughout the class while disturbing their other friends as well as disturbing the teacher (Hartienah, 2024). Thus, students' behaviours may also present a particular challenge to English teachers to both those having English background and those having non-English major, especially when they have limited knowledge on the strategies to deal with young learners.

As the research on the teaching strategies used by teachers with non-English background are still limited in numbers and much still needs to be explored, this current study focused on revealing the strategies used by non-English background teacher who were teaching English in elementary schools in Pekalongan Regency, Central Java. Apart from that, this study would like to explore the challenges faced by those teachers in teaching English at their schools. Our research questions were 1) What are the strategies used by teachers with non-English background in teaching English at elementary schools? and 2) What are the challenges faced by teachers with non-English background in teaching English at elementary schools? This current study is important to conduct as the complex issues about teaching English in elementary schools have not been revealed fully in Indonesia. It is expected that this current study can add to the body of literature on how teachers with non-English Major actually conduct their English teaching in schools. Moreover, this study can provide the information on the true challenges encountered by teachers in teaching English for young learners in elementary schools in Indonesia, enriching the literature on the issues of teaching English as a foreign language in the lower educational levels across the world.

## **METHOD**

This study belonged to qualitative study in the form of case study. Qualitative research is a method for investigating and comprehending the significance that people or groups attach to a social or human issue (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative study looked at many important aspects of the phenomenon, and thus it was deemed appropriate for this study. As this study belonged to qualitative study, the data used will be in the form of qualitative data. Lesia et al. (2021) define qualitative data as any non-numerical knowledge sources, such as text, voice, visuals, or any mix of these. Since qualitative data is distinct and refers to the interpretation of



accessible knowledge, it is defined as data that is not taken from quantitative or related elements. To collect the data, the writers employed a number of instruments such as questionnaires and interviews. The data were collected from five teachers from both state and private elementary schools in Pekalongan Regency, Central Java. The main data collection was done through the interview. However, to gain initial information about the respondents, the writers required those teachers to complete a questionnaire which mainly asked about their personal information like the educational background, experience of joining any trainings or workshop, levels of confidence in teaching English, strategies to overcome the limited skills in English, strategies to improve their teaching practices, and students' responses when they taught English.

To analyze the questionnaire, the writers conducted descriptive statistics analysis and presented the data in form percentage. Then to analyze the interview data, the writers conducted thematic analysis, in which the writers transcribed the interview, read the transcripts several times, put the codes for important data, categorize the codes into categories and then grouped the categories into several themes.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings From the Questionnaire

The English teachers in elementary schools who participated in this research were teachers with an average age of over 35 years. As this was a qualitative study, we did not invite many respondents. The initial target respondents were eight teachers from different elementary schools in Pekalongan Regency. However, after completing the initial questionnaire, only five respondents were able to participate in the interview. Below is the findings from the questionnaire which has been completed by the eight respondents.

The results of the questionnaire showed that 25% of respondents were men and 75% of respondents were women. Significant teaching experience was also possessed by the teachers who participated in this study. According to the teachers' responses, all respondents (100%) stated that they had taught for more than six years. This meant that the respondents in this study were people who had been teaching for a long time and had experienced a lot of things while working at the primary school level. However, the respondents were classroom teachers who were not initially expected to teach English, therefore teaching English was a novel experience for them. This can be seen from their responses in the questionnaires.

**Table 1. Teachers' English Educational Background**

Questions	Answers (%)	
	Yes	No
Do you have an educational background as an English teacher?	25	75
Have you ever participated in training to teach English?	62.5	37.5
Do you feel confident enough in teaching English?	50	50

Based on Table 1, the respondents acknowledged that not all of them had English teaching skills because they had no educational background of as an English teacher. Besides not all of them had the experience of joining or participating in any trainings, courses, workshops for teaching English. In addition, only half of them had sufficient confidence in teaching English and the rest felt unconfident in teaching English. Further, the questionnaire also reveals teachers' strategies in teaching English. The summary can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2. Teachers' strategies in improving English teaching skills and students' reactions**

Questions	Options	Answers %
How do you overcome limitations in English proficiency?	Take an English course	-
	Study through the internet and book	75
	Learn independently	25
How do students react to the way you teach English?	Enthusiastic and active	12.5
	Be varied (unstable)	75
	Less responsive	12.5
In your opinion, what can help you to be better at teaching English?	Access to learning	25
	Mentoring and support	62.5
	Take an English course	12.5



Table 2 shows that the respondents in this study had made some efforts to teach English. The majority had used the internet and book to upgrade their English. This means that the respondents had the initiatives to use what they had around them to improve their teaching skills. The rest reported that they did independent learning. Even when their efforts varied, this signals the teachers' good passion for teaching English since they wanted better mastery of English and they were willing to serve as English teachers in their schools. Even, more than half search for mentors and extra support to help them improve their English mastery. Others found some access to learning and took an English course. The various efforts mentioned by the respondents seemed to help them to compensate for the absence of English Language Education background in themselves.

In terms of students' reactions to their teaching, the respondents mentioned that the majority of students showed various reactions in which at some sessions they were enthusiastic but at the other sessions they were not. The dynamics of students' reactions were quite normal as classroom situations and materials might also varied across time.

### Findings from the Interview

Comparing the findings from the questionnaire and the interview, some responses in the questionnaire were strengthened in the interviews. The interviews were held regarding the strategies that English teachers in elementary schools have employed to teach the language, as well as the challenges that these teachers typically faced. The summary of the teaching strategies used and difficulties faced by English teachers in primary schools revealed in the interview can be seen in the table 3.

**Table 3. Summary of Interview results**

Aspects	Responses				
	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5
Strategies	Using English videos and songs	Using videos and teaching aids/ props	Using pictures and class discussion	Using pictures and English songs	Using real objects (realia)
Special strategies	-	-	-	-	-
Teaching tools/media	Videos from YouTube	Videos from YouTube	Pictures from internet	Pictures & songs from internet	Real objects & pictures from internet
Songs/ games	Games	songs	songs	games	songs
Challenge(s)	From students	From teacher	From students	From students	From teacher
References	Textbook, internet	Textbook, YouTube	Textbook, internet	Textbook	Textbook, English short story books
School Facilities	Complete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete	Complete
Efforts to overcome students' delayed understanding of English	Provide additional English classes	Instructed students to take English courses	-	Instructed students to take English courses	Provide additional English classes

Table 3 shows that in general, the teachers who taught English did not mentioned any special strategies for teaching English. Perhaps this was due to their limited English proficiency and the absence of a special background as English teachers. They only used media available on the internet like you tube videos and songs. This means that they relied on internet-based media without developing it further. Teaching strategies were also the same; most English teachers used outdated strategies and did not create or apply different approaches. The absence of a background as English teachers might have made it difficult for them to overcome problems that arose in the English teaching and learning process, which also resulted in some students experiencing difficulties and delays in following English materials. Even so, with their limited English skills, some teachers had found solutions to helps the students improve their understanding of English. Some suggested students to



take English courses outside of the schools. Some other provides additional English classes. However, there was one teacher who had no solutions at all. The findings can be discussed further in the following sections.

### **The strategies used by English teachers at elementary school**

Based on the interviews, the researchers found that English teachers in primary schools who became the respondents in this study had no special strategies for teaching English. As one of the respondents said in the interview said:

*"I didn't use special strategies while teaching English in class; I used the same strategies in every teaching."* [T1]

All four other teachers gave similar statements regarding the absence of special strategies in teaching English. This was probably because the teachers who taught English in primary schools did not have an educational background as English teachers, as being reported in the questionnaire in which 75% of them had no English Language Education background. As a result, the teachers had only one strategy for teaching English. Without a specialized background in English education, the respondents, who were teachers from different schools, simply relied on existing strategies.

In terms of the media used to support the teaching process varied from one teacher to another, which of course differed from school to school. Media, or commonly referred to as teaching tools, were quite varied among the five English teachers in elementary schools who became the respondents in this study. Teachers usually used videos, songs and pictures as well as games. Only one teacher used real objects or realia as examples in English learning during class sessions. According to this teacher, using real objects to provide examples in English learning proved to be very efficient and it attracted students' interest in learning English. He said:

*"Students at the elementary school level were very new to English, so to teach this new language to them certainly required teaching tools that were interesting to them. I used a real object like a table, and then they started to describe the table using English. It proved to be able to attract students' enthusiasm in learning English."* [T5]

He added that using real objects (realia) as media in teaching English had many advantages for students. For example, students had better understanding about the materials when realia were used. The students also had higher interests in learning and the class became more lively when realia were used.

Two respondents preferred to used videos taken from YouTube as media or teaching tools in teaching English in the classroom. Teaching using videos from YouTube made students excited about learning English. This was explained by one of the teachers:

*"Using videos that I took from YouTube was quite effective in delivering the material. Many students found it easier to understand the material being taught by watching the video compared to when I explained it myself. On the other hand, by using videos, the children were more interested because of the images and sounds displayed."* [T2]

Another respondent added:

*"I preferred English textbooks and story books to use in my class"* [T5]

Neither the self-made module nor the school module was selected as the source by any respondents. This finding suggests that these teachers favored using easily accessible resources, like online resources and textbooks. Because it could have been difficult to create or compile their own materials, respondents chose to use pre-existing resources.

### **The difficulties faced by English teachers while teaching English**

In terms of difficulties and challenges that English teachers faced when teaching in primary schools, of the five respondents, two of them stated that the difficulties in teaching English came from themselves, and the other three stated that the difficulties in teaching English in primary schools came from the students. One of them said:

*"I realized that my English skills were still very poor, so it was a challenge for me to teach English. My lack of English skills often led to errors in delivery, which I then realized at the end of the class."* [T1]

This is in line with the questionnaire data, which showed that 62.5% of English teachers in primary schools had not attended English courses. As a result, their English language skills were still very limited and had not been developed.



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Other respondents who come from different schools stated that the difficulties came from the students explained:

*"Most of the students I taught still did not know what English was at all, so understanding the meaning of a word was still difficult. That was my difficulty in teaching English, especially with my very limited English language skills."* [T3]

The teachers' answers above suggested that they acknowledged their own limitation as teachers with non-English background. Even so, some pointed that it is the students who became the challenges.

Other teacher (T4) mentioned different challenge, namely the lack of school facilities:

*"For me, what limits me in my English teaching is the limited and insufficient facilities at school. So, I only used pictures because they are easy to obtain"* [T4]

The findings of this current study back up the notion that English teachers in elementary schools without English background or specialized training to teach English have limited capacity in teaching English. This study has shown that the teachers accepted that they had poor ability in teaching as they had no English background. This is in line with the findings of Falah, Apsari and Kusumah (2023) in which teachers had limited English skills. Teachers in this study also did not employ unique or special teaching methods when teaching English. It may mean that these teachers just taught the subjects without any special preparation and technique. Instead, they relied solely on the media that were readily available like Youtube videos, pictures and songs from the internet and realia and they did not have the initiatives to develop any other teaching media. This supports the findings of a study conducted by Yusrina, Setyaningsih and Putra (2025) in which teachers with no English background had difficulties in designing learning activities and developing materials and media.

The findings of this current studies also show that students' inability to understand English words hindered the success of English teaching in the elementary schools in Pekalongan Regency. This agrees with the findings of the studies carried out by Pratama and Fatimah (2024) and Falah et al. (2023) in which students' difficulties in understanding English vocabulary became a particular challenge in the English classrooms.

Further, the teachers in this current study perceived limited school facilities as one of the challenges in the English teaching in elementary schools. This is in agreement to Falah's et. al (2023) in which English subject was given less support from school compared to compulsory subjects.

Overall, this study has revealed that the special strategies were not found in the teaching of English in elementary schools done by teachers with non-English Background. This is perhaps due to their limited knowledge about how to select a particular strategy in teaching English. In addition, teachers showed no initiative to develop any teaching media by themselves and preferred to employ what are easy to get from the internet. In terms of challenges, however, this study was successful in revealing teachers' challenges namely the poor English, the students' poor English ability and the poor school facilities.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study tried to explore the strategies used by teachers with non-English background in teaching English at the elementary schools in Pekalongan Regency, Central Java. The findings of the study, however, suggest that the teachers did not have any special teaching strategies. This is likely to result from their limited capability in selecting and developing any teaching strategies. Teachers were also found to use any available media and learning sources from the internet, suggesting that they have not shown any initiative to design and develop any teaching media themselves. This was not a fault, but rather it became a reminder that these teachers actually need to be supported with training on how to teach English in elementary schools along with some training on how to develop teaching media for teaching young learners. In terms of challenges encountered by the respondents in this study, this current study revealed at least three main challenges namely teachers' poor English, students' poor ability in English, and poor facilities at schools. Part of the limitation of this study was the number of the respondents which were employed in this study, which was only five teachers. Future research can be done in the same areas by employing more respondents. Similar research can also be done in different areas of Indonesia so that more information can be provided about the teaching of English in elementary schools across regions of Indonesia along with its specific and common challenges encountered by teachers.

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