

MISALIGNMENT CHALLENGES IN TEACHING ENGLISH AT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEVEL

Rinduani Putri Ayu
Universitas Sriwijaya
06011282126029@student.unsri.ac.id

Machdalena Vianty*
Universitas Sriwijaya
machdalenavianty@fkip.unsri.ac.id

Abstract: This study explores the challenges faced by the alumni of Pendidikan Profesi Guru (PPG) Prajabatan or Pre-Service Teacher Profession Education Program in teaching English at the elementary school level. Their perspectives are particularly valuable as they represent novice teachers who directly experience the realities of classroom implementation, making their insights crucial for understanding the alignment between curriculum and practice. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected from three alumni through written interviews, which allowed participants to respond at their own pace, ensuring thoughtful and reflective answers. The responses were then analyzed thematically. The study identified four main challenges in implementing English teaching at the elementary level: (1) a mismatch between curriculum content and students' proficiency levels, (2) limited structured listening input and learning aids, (3) misalignment between curriculum design and classroom realities, and (4) insufficient teacher autonomy to adapt materials for linguistic and cultural relevance. These results highlight the need for curriculum adjustments to support English teaching at the elementary level, including context-specific training and resource provision. The findings have important implications for teacher professional development, as they emphasize the necessity of equipping teachers with practical strategies and adaptable resources. Moreover, by addressing these challenges, schools can foster more effective English learning experiences, thereby improving student learning outcomes and ensuring more equitable access to language education.

Keywords: *PPG, English Teaching Challenges, Curriculum Content, Elementary School, Indonesia.*

INTRODUCTION

English has become the lingua franca so mastery of English is essential for individuals who want to participate in the global community (Crystal, 2003). English also acts as a tool to access scientific knowledge and modern technology which is essential in improving competitiveness in the global market (Lauder, 2008). The mastery of English has a strategic role in various fields such as economy, diplomacy, and education (Yadnya, 2016). In the academic context, English serves as the main access to science and technology, especially through international scientific publications.

In Indonesia, although not widely used in the official sphere, English is still prioritized as the most important foreign language in the education system (Lauder, 2008). English is

taught from elementary school to university levels in Indonesia, but its status is still as a foreign language (EFL) rather than as a second language (ESL) (Rahmah & Qamariah, 2023). The development of language skills in early childhood is an important aspect, because at this stage there is rapid development in various aspects, including physical, moral, intellectual, social-emotional, and language (Saraswati, 2013). As what has been stated by Blackledge and Crese (2010, as cited in Copland & Garton, 2014), children can learn more than one language simultaneously and often do in their home and social contexts.

The teaching of English in Indonesian primary schools has evolved gradually over time. In 1994, English was first introduced as a local content subject through the Basic Education Curriculum, making it an optional subject adapted to the needs of each region. This approach was later reinforced in 2014 with Regulation Number 79, which emphasized that local content should reflect regional conditions to ensure contextual learning. A major shift occurred in 2024, when Regulation Number 12 stipulated that English would become a compulsory subject in primary school starting in the 2027/2028 academic year. To ensure successful implementation, the policy will be carried out in stages, taking into account the readiness of regions, the capacity of schools, and the quality of teachers, supported by targeted training programs.

However, previous studies reflect that policies regarding the teaching of English at the primary school level in Indonesia still vary and adjust to the conditions and policies of each educational institution. For example, Ardaya et al., (2022) reported that the implementation of Curriculum 2013 at one state primary school in Gresik still included English as part of extracurricular activities. In line with this, Purandina (2022) also reported that elementary schools in Bali, especially at Marga sub-district, Tabanan, applied English as a local content learning. English was also taught as a local content at SDN 97 Inpres Tellupanuae, Mallawa District, Maros Regency, South Sulawesi (Hambali et al., 2021).

Numerous studies have also reported the challenges in teaching and learning of English at the elementary school level in Indonesia can be grouped into three main categories: linguistic, pedagogical, and infrastructural. Linguistic challenges include students' lack of prior knowledge of English, low interest and motivation, negative perceptions that English is a difficult subject, and anxiety in using the language (Harlina & Yusuf, 2020; Pertiwi et al., 2022). Pedagogical challenges are related to teachers' limited competence especially in rural schools, the difficulty in selecting appropriate materials and activities for diverse learners, the development of effective teaching strategies, and the management of large and uncondusive classes that hinder teacher and student interactions (Hartienah & Soviyah, 2024; Muzaki, 2023). Infrastructural challenges involves the limited availability of English language teaching resources such as textbooks and audiovisual media, insufficient learning time, inadequate learning media, and lack of support from parents and the surrounding environment (Bayuaji, 2010; Pertiwi et al., 2022). Overall, the challenges vary greatly on the geographical context, the availability of resources, and the quality of teachers.

As previously highlighted in the previous paragraph, one of the challenges in teaching English at the elementary school level in Indonesia is concerned with the teachers who have

the inadequate knowledge of English teaching while as Hidayah et al., (2024) underline, teachers hold an important key in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, having teachers that have the competence to teach English and have been professionally trained is very important. Indonesian government has done its effort in relation to this issue through the program of *Pendidikan Profesi Guru (PPG) Prajabatan or Calon Guru*. This program is a professional education program to produce *Generasi Baru Guru Indonesia* who have a calling to become teachers, are professional, committed to being a role model, love the profession, and are lifelong learners (Education, Directorate of Teacher Profession, 2024).

This present study was aimed to explore the experiences of alumni from *Pendidikan Profesi Guru (PPG) Prajabatan* Program of Universitas Sriwijaya who are currently teaching English at elementary schools through the *Pegawai Pemerintah dengan Perjanjian Kerja* or P3K scheme. Specifically, this research seeks to understand the challenges they faced in English language instruction at the primary level. Accordingly, this study addressed the following research question: What are the challenges of the alumni of PPG Prajabatan Program especially in relation the actualization of the curriculum in the teaching and learning activities of English in the classroom. These challenges are important to examine because they directly reflect how far the PPG *Prajabatan* program has achieved its purpose of preparing professional, committed, and lifelong learner teachers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the challenges experienced by the alumni of the PPG Prajabatan Program of FKIP Universitas Sriwijaya teaching English at the elementary school level especially in relation the actualization of the curriculum in the teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Semi-structured written interviews were used as the primary instrument for data collection. In this study, four interview questions were administered without any follow-up, and the data collection process was conducted over a period of 11 days. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research seeks to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human issue. The use of written interviews in this study provided participants the flexibility to respond at their own pace and convenience, thereby reducing pressure and promoting thoughtful reflection. In addition, written interviews minimize interviewer bias and facilitate organized responses while allowing for efficient documentation (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Mehra, 2002; Novick, 2008). This method was chosen instead of oral or face-to-face interviews because the participants were alumni who were already working as full-time teachers with demanding schedules. Written interviews offered them the opportunity to participate without the time constraints of synchronous meetings, while also reducing potential discomfort or social desirability bias that may occur in direct face-to-face interactions. Moreover, written responses encouraged deeper and more considered reflection on their experiences, which was crucial for exploring the nuanced challenges they encountered in actualizing the curriculum.

Participants

This study involved alumni of the PPG Prajabatan Program from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), Universitas Sriwijaya, who have been employed as *Pegawai Pemerintah dengan Perjanjian Kerja (P3K)* and were assigned to teach at elementary schools in Palembang. The total population consisted of 38 alumni from the 2022 cohort who were teaching English at various primary schools across the city. To select the participants, a purposive sampling technique was employed. The criteria for selection required that participants were actively teaching English as a subject, or in other words, serving as *Guru Mata Pelajaran*. Based on this criterion, 3 alumni met the requirements and were involved as the research participants. They were assigned to different public elementary school in Palembang, namely SD Negeri 131 Palembang, SD Negeri 14 Palembang, and SD Negeri 192 Palembang. Each of them taught in distinct classroom settings, which provided varied contexts that enriched the data on the implementation of the English curriculum. These individuals had direct classroom experience teaching English at the elementary level, making them suitable informants for investigating the challenges encountered in their teaching practice. The relatively small number of participants was due to the fact that only these alumni were actively teaching English as a subject (*Guru Mata Pelajaran*) at the elementary level, while the other alumni were placed in school where English was not offered as a local content subject.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data in this study were collected using open-ended written interview questions. These questions were shared with the participants through a WhatsApp Group and the interview was aimed to gather information about the challenges, especially in relation the actualization of the curriculum in the teaching and learning activities of English in the classroom. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the responses were read several times to become familiar with the content. Second, important words or phrases that reflected teaching challenges were highlighted and coded. Third, these codes were grouped into broader categories to form initial themes. Fourth, the themes were reviewed to ensure they consistently represented the data. Fifth, the themes were clearly defined and named, such as “curriculum challenges” or “classroom management.” Finally, the themes were synthesized into a report to describe the main difficulties experienced by the participants. This process helped the researcher identify common patterns and better understand the key challenges in English instruction at the elementary level.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Mismatch Between Curriculum Content and Learner Proficiency

This study found a significant misalignment between elementary school students' language skills and the English curriculum materials. Participant B emphasized that while the curriculum themes are generally appropriate, such as "Independence Day" or "traditional foods," many students lack the foundational English skills required to engage with such content. She stated,

“Materinya memang sesuai, akan tetapi kemampuannya tidak setara... harus ada penyesuaian agar anak-anak... bisa mengikuti.” (B)

This indicates that the curriculum often presumes prior knowledge that many students have not yet acquired. The issue becomes more complicated in classrooms with mixed

proficiency levels, where differentiated instruction is necessary, but difficult to implement effectively. Participant B illustrated this challenge as follows.

“Ketika memiliki anak yang sudah memiliki atau memahami pengetahuan awal, tetapi ada temannya yang belum. Jadi jika materinya terlalu mudah kasian anak-anak yang sudah paham, tetapi jika terlalu sulit kasihan anak-anak yang belum memahami materi tersebut.” (B)

As a result, teachers are in the challenging position of having to adapt their presentation to ensure it remains understandable for beginning students, yet remains relevant and challenging for more advanced students. One concrete example of this problem occurred in a fifth-grade classroom, when students were asked to write the price of an item using terms like "hundred" and "thousand." Participant B explained the problem as follows:

“Di kelas 5 siswa diminta menulis harga barang dalam bahasa Inggris seperti ‘hundred’ dan ‘thousand’, padahal banyak yang belum hafal angka 1-100. Mereka kesulitan karena tidak memahami konsepnya.” (B)

This situation indicates that students' language skills are not yet aligned with curriculum targets, particularly when they still struggle to grasp basic concepts and numbers. Based on Vygotsky's (1978) *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)* concept, learning will be more effective if the material presented is slightly beyond students' abilities but still accessible with assistance. However, in this context, the curriculum often does not provide adequate support, hindering the learning process and reducing student engagement.

Participant U expressed similar sentiments, stating that most of her students had only started learning English since they were in 4th grade:

“Siswa/i baru mendapatkan pelajaran di kelas 4... belum pernah terpapar bahasa Inggris.” (U)

This delay in English language acquisition makes it difficult for students to follow the curriculum. She also highlighted the limited teaching time available:

“Selama satu dua semester yang saya lalui selalu kekurangan waktu untuk mengejar TP yang disediakan, karena durasi per minggu yang tidak banyak, ditambah minggu efektif yang tersedia tidak selaras dengan TP yang ada.” (U)

This situation suggested that time constraints further widen the gap between curriculum demands and students' ability to achieve them. Zein (2017) similarly expressed the point that the tight schedule of English lessons, especially in public schools, encourages teachers to deliver material in a rushed manner, often resulting in students' understanding being compromised.

Participant N expressed a more neutral opinion, saying that the curriculum was generally quite appropriate, but she still faced difficulties when teaching students from rural areas:

“Pembelajaran berdiferensiasi sudah cukup selaras dengan kebutuhan tingkat bahasa siswa, tetapi karena banyak siswa yang berasal dari daerah sehingga mereka merasa asing dengan bahasa Indonesia maupun bahasa Inggris.” (N)

This observation suggests that language unfamiliarity, even with Bahasa Indonesia, can exacerbate learning difficulties, especially for students from remote areas. These findings align with previous studies that suggest that curricula are often designed with the assumption that all students have the same level of readiness, when in reality, classes are comprised of students with diverse backgrounds and abilities (Muzaki, 2023; Pertiwi et al., 2022). Rigid curricula, limited learning time, and a lack of implementation guidance present teachers with systemic challenges. Therefore, curricula should be designed with students' baseline abilities in mind and provide clear milestones for students who need additional support or are more advanced.

Insufficient Listening Input and Learning Aids

This present study reported that listening activities were still very minimal in English learning at the elementary school level. One of the main problems raised by the participants was the lack of a dedicated listening section in the students' textbooks, as well as the lack of supporting facilities in the classroom. Participant B highlighted that the current curriculum does not provide structured listening content, thus making it difficult to develop students' listening skills.

"Materi di buku Kurikulum Merdeka tidak menyediakan seksi listening... saya mengkalinya dengan bernyanyi lagu-lagu." (B)

To address this, she incorporated songs like "The Wheels on the Bus" and "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" into her lessons. This strategy not only honed students' listening and pronunciation skills, but also created a more enjoyable and interactive learning environment.

Participant U also revealed experiencing similar obstacles, particularly related to the lack of basic audio equipment at the school where he teaches.

"Fasilitas seperti pengeras suara atau proyektor tidak tersedia... buku penunjang listening juga tidak ada." (U)

She added that teachers often have to provide audio devices personally, adding to their workload in already resource-constrained environments. She further highlighted the need for a platform aimed at sharing creative and user-friendly listening materials among English teachers.

Participant N also highlighted limitations in textbooks, particularly the lack of audio-based materials. As a solution, he utilized various alternative learning activities:

"Materi yang tidak ada dalam listening saya bentuk dalam ice breaking untuk menambah kosakata." (N)

These icebreaker activities and simple songs serve as tools to help students feel more comfortable using English, especially those who are not yet familiar with Indonesian. This situation reflects the lack of focus on listening skills in the current English curriculum and available resources. According to Krashen's (1982) *Input Hypothesis*, comprehensible input especially auditory is crucial in second language acquisition. In line with this, Widodo et al., (2023) found that multimodal input, including listening materials, significantly enhances vocabulary retention in EFL learners.

However, the findings of this study indicate that listening remains underrepresented in both textbook content and classroom practice. Because of these conditions, the teachers are

often forced to create their own listening activities and materials, relying on their own creativity without much support from the school. While songs and games can be helpful, they cannot replace planned, curriculum-aligned listening practice. Furthermore, limited technological resources, such as speakers or projectors, also hinder the implementation of more realistic and authentic listening activities in the classroom.

This finding highlights a critical gap in the curriculum's ability to support the development of listening comprehension at the elementary school level. Addressing this issue requires not only the inclusion of listening activities in textbooks, but also systemic improvements in school facilities, teaching resources, and the availability of accessible audio-based platforms. Providing these supports would empower teachers to offer more balanced, engaging, and effective English learning experiences for young learners.

Tension Between Curriculum Design and Classroom Reality

Another major challenge highlighted in this study is the tension between the design of the English curriculum and the reality of classroom implementation. Although the curriculum may appear manageable in structure, teachers reported varying experiences depending on their school context, teaching resources, and student readiness.

Participant U expressed concern about the limited teaching time available to meet all learning outcomes (TP). She stated that the tight lesson schedule often does not align with the demands set out in the curriculum.

"Selalu kekurangan waktu untuk mengejar TP yang disediakan... minggu efektif tidak selaras dengan TP." (U)

Participant U felt pressured to move on to the next unit even when students had not fully grasped the previous material. To address this, she assigned homework, memorization tasks, and small projects to ensure that students could still engage with the content outside regular classroom hours. In a similar vein, Participant N noted challenges in adapting the curriculum, especially when teaching under the 2013 Curriculum (K13), which lacked sufficient teaching materials. She stated:

"Kesulitan menyesuaikan materi ketika mengajar kelas yang masih menggunakan Kurikulum 2013." (N)

Due to the absence of standardized textbooks, Participant N often improvised by adapting materials from other subjects particularly Bahasa Indonesia to suit English lessons. This improvisation added to her teaching workload and required creativity and flexibility beyond what the curriculum initially anticipated.

In contrast, Participant B reported no significant difficulties in managing lesson time. She found the curriculum to be flexible enough, stating,

"Tidak merasa kesulitan dalam menyelesaikan materi sesuai waktu, karena kurikulum tidak terasa terlalu ketat." (B)

Participant B typically completed one unit of material within two to three sessions and adjusted her lesson plans accordingly to meet the expected outcomes without feeling rushed.

The gap between curricular design and classroom execution aligns with Tyler's (1949) curriculum model, which emphasizes the need for coherence between learning objectives,

instructional experiences, and assessment. When actual classroom conditions such as limited time and varying student readiness do not support the intended curriculum pace and content, this alignment becomes disrupted, reducing the effectiveness of instruction. Furthermore, the coexistence of two different curricula (K13 and Kurikulum Merdeka) in some schools has caused inconsistencies in teaching materials and lesson planning. This inconsistency not only affects curriculum delivery but also adds to teacher workload and reflects broader systemic issues, including the lack of continuity in education policy and unequal access to educational resources.

In summary, the tension between curriculum expectations and classroom realities requires thoughtful planning, curriculum support tools, and policy consistency. Teachers need sufficient flexibility to adapt the curriculum to diverse learning contexts while ensuring that learning objectives remain attainable and meaningful for all students.

Cultural Relevance and Local Adaptation

The fourth finding indicates that there remains a gap between the cultural content in the curriculum and its actual classroom application, tailored to the students' local backgrounds and languages. Although the Independent Curriculum has attempted to incorporate elements of Indonesian culture, such as traditional foods, Independence Day, and regional images, teachers in this study assessed that these efforts remain limited and do not fully reflect the diversity of classroom conditions.

Participant N appreciated the use of local cultural imagery in reading materials and acknowledged its positive effect in creating familiarity. Participant N said,

"Kami dapat beradaptasi dengan konteks lokal... teks bacaan menggunakan gambar kearifan lokal."(N)

However, she noted that many students in her class still speak their ethnic language at home, which makes even Bahasa Indonesia feel unfamiliar let alone English. This linguistic gap complicates students' engagement with the content, even when cultural references are present.

Similarly, Participant U acknowledged the curriculum's effort to contextualize material but emphasized that teachers still lack the freedom to design learning experiences that fully reflect the students' backgrounds, needs, and learning pace. She said as follows.

"Kurikulum belum memberikan guru ruang luas untuk mendesain sesuai kebutuhan dan budaya lokal."(U)

According to Participant U, the ATP (*Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran*) only offers space for planning, but not for creating new content that truly aligns with the classroom's social and cultural realities.

Participant B also emphasized that although textbook themes are contextual, the language level is often too advanced for beginners who have never been exposed to English. She said,

"Meskipun tema dalam buku sudah kontekstual, materi tetap perlu disesuaikan dengan kemampuan nyata siswa yang sebagian besar belum pernah terpapar bahasa Inggris."(B)

This reflects that while surface-level cultural themes exist, deeper adjustments are needed to meet students where they are in terms of language readiness and local experience. These findings align with Banks' (2006) *theory of Multicultural Education*, which advocates for embedding students' cultural identities into curriculum content to promote equity, engagement, and identity development. Banks argues that culturally responsive curricula not only validate students' backgrounds but also foster stronger connections to learning material and promote social justice in education. When students see their own values, traditions, and languages reflected in class content, they are more likely to participate actively and feel included. Similarly with what Hermida et al., (2024) found that culturally relevant content improves motivation and comprehension in multilingual classrooms, particularly in regions with diverse sociolinguistic backgrounds. This present study supports these claims, showing that while national curriculum guidelines may include cultural components, the lack of flexibility in adapting them to students-lived realities limits their full potential. The participants expressed the need for greater autonomy in selecting and designing content that aligns not only with national standards but also with students' local languages, traditions, and community experiences.

In summary, the finding highlights the need to move beyond token cultural references in the curriculum toward deeper, more meaningful integration of students' cultural and linguistic contexts. Doing so can foster a more inclusive, relevant, and effective learning environment, especially in classrooms with high diversity.

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the multifaceted challenges faced by PPG Prajabatan alumni teaching English at the elementary school level in Indonesia, particularly regarding the actualization of the curriculum in classroom practice. While the government's recent policy to make English a compulsory subject in primary schools by 2027/2028 demonstrates a strong commitment to strengthening early English competence, its success largely depends on how effectively the curriculum can be adapted to meet students' real learning conditions.

The findings reveal four critical areas of concern. First, there exists a clear mismatch between curriculum content and students' actual proficiency levels, which often places undue pressure on both learners and teachers. Second, the scarcity of structured listening input and adequate learning aids limits opportunities for developing essential language skills, forcing teachers to rely heavily on their creativity and personal resources. Third, tensions between curriculum design and classroom realities such as limited instructional time, varying curricula (K13 and Kurikulum Merdeka), and insufficient teaching materials further complicate implementation. Lastly, despite attempts to include local cultural content, the curriculum still falls short of providing teachers with enough autonomy to design learning that is both linguistically accessible and culturally relevant.

In conclusion, these findings highlight the urgent need for curriculum developers, policymakers, and educational institutions to provide more flexible, context-sensitive frameworks, along with adequate resources and professional support for teachers. Ensuring the availability of differentiated teaching strategies, sufficient listening materials, and culturally responsive content will be crucial to bridging the gap between national curriculum expectations and classroom realities. By doing so, Indonesia can better prepare its young learners not only

to acquire English proficiency but also to engage confidently in a globalized world while remaining rooted in their cultural identities.

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