

Challenges in teaching English for young learners at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the challenges faced by English teachers at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco, an elementary school in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and an independent curriculum simultaneously. The study employs a case study design, focusing on an English teacher at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco, Kotagede, Yogyakarta. This research using thematic analysis of observational and interview data. Findings reveal two significant challenges: the demand for creativity and teaching skills, and the necessity of managing diverse student characteristics. The study emphasizes the importance of teacher creativity and sensitivity to student needs in navigating the complexities of the curriculum and fostering effective language education.

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1. Introduction

English is one of the languages that can unify communication among the world's population. According to Ilyosovna (2020), English is used by 67 countries as their official language and 27 countries as the second language, make it as the most used language in the world. The demands of the current era, where each individual must be able to develop themselves, particularly in languages, make proficiency in multiple languages a crucial aspect when pursuing a career in the future. However, acquiring English as a foreign language is not easy for countries that do not use English as their first or second language. Therefore, it is important for Indonesians to learn English from a young age to achieve fluency.

As a foreign language, teaching English to young learners, is not easy. According to Aslamiah (2022), young learner is a student of elementary school between 6-12 years old. Young learner has its own characteristic when it comes to the learning process. According to Reilly and Ward (1997), young learner had several characteristics in the class. There are (1) individual attention, (2) attention span, (3) the silent period, (4) Pre-School Teaching.

It is important for the teacher to find out how to deal with young learners. According to Cahyati and Madya (2019), young learners may have different situation in term of learning English, where some students may struggle and some may not. The teacher needs to give the student an individual attention for the students to let them say about the learning process. It is also important for the teacher to take a note about what the students can really enjoy and create a new activity or new environment. Moreover, teacher needs to know that it is not a good idea to force the students to speak during the silent period. To overcome this, teacher could conduct various activity like games, sing along, rhymes, and plenty of choral work to make the students speak without feel the stress of having to speak

individually and motivated them. This theory is also supported by Adisti et al. (2021) that encourage young learners to naturally acquire English by engaging them with entertaining classroom activities, inviting their active participation in games, and incorporating various interactive approaches. Last, teacher should not rush the students for the learning target, especially pre-school students, when students enjoy a particular activity. Young learners also could be selfish, uncooperative, and disobedient. Therefore, teacher needs an enormous amount of patience to face them.

Besides, teachers have their own challenges in adapting to the existing curriculum and school environment. According to Kemendikbud's website (2023), Kurikulum Merdeka is a curriculum with intracurricular learning where the content is more optimal for the students, and teachers can explore the method and media based on their students' characteristics. The Merdeka Curriculum was created to enhance the quality of Indonesia's education system. The word 'Merdeka' itself has a term of 'Freedom' or 'Independent' for the students, teachers, and the institution to explore. According to Saleh (2020) the aim of Kurikulum Merdeka is to explore students and teachers' potential in fostering a higher learning level in the classroom.

Over the span of years, studies related to the challenges of the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka have been conducted, and discovered several factors. The study by Anggraini (2018) identified specific challenges, including inadequate government support due to the status of English as a local content subject in K-13 curriculum. Internally, the lack of teacher competence, particularly in English proficiency and pedagogical knowledge, poses substantial obstacles. Marzulina, et al (2021) found that there are several challenges faced by English teachers, for example improving motivation, improving the language competence, managing the class, limited time, and lack of facilities. Reza and Abdullah (2023) stated that Kurikulum Merdeka places significant importance on acknowledging and appreciating the distinct traits and individuality of every student, a notable advantage that should not be overlooked.

SD Muhammadiyah Kleco is one of the elementary schools located in Kotagede, Yogyakarta. Muhammadiyah Elementary School uses the independent curriculum as the main curriculum for grades 1, 2, 4, and 5. Meanwhile, grades 3 and 6 still use K-13. Facing this situation, it is certainly not easy for teachers to adapt to teaching using two curriculums at the same time. Moreover, teaching elementary school students has its own difficulties as mentioned above.

To help the writer to find the data and limit the research, the writer formulates the research question as follows: *What are the challenges faced by SD Muhammadiyah Kleco English Teacher in teaching English for young learners?*

Based on the background above, the goal of this research is to investigate the challenges faced by English teachers at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco. This article will discover the experience of the teacher in teaching English.

2. Method

A case study was applied as the research design in this study. According to Creswell (2014), case study is a qualitative approach by exploring the issue through in-depth data collection. The subject of this research is an English teacher in SD Muhammadiyah Kleco who teach 1st, 2nd, and 6th grade students with formal teaching experience around five months. The data was collected through observation and interview with the subject. In analyzing data, the researcher used thematic analysis to analyze the observation and interview data. According to Alhojailan (2012), thematic analysis is utilized to examine classification and to identify themes that are connected to the data. In order to validate the credibility and reliability of the research and to bolster the accuracy of the interpretations, the researcher incorporated exact excerpts from the transcribed interviews. The setting of the research is at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco Unit 1, located at Tegal Gendu street no. 3, Kotagede, Yogyakarta.

3. Findings and Discussion

In this research, there are 8 classess that is observed by the researcher, which are 4 class of 1st grade (1-Shidiq, 1-Fathonah, 1-Amanah, 1-Tabligh) and 4 class of 2nd grade (2-Shidiq, 2-Fathonah, 2-Amanah, 2-Tabligh), with 22-24 students in the class. Based on the observation and the interview

conducted by the researcher, there are several challenges in teaching English at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco faced by the teacher.



Fig. 1. Learning Process (Topic : Color)

3.1. Creativity

One of the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching, especially when using an independent curriculum, is creativity and skills in teaching. The freedom in teaching provided by the independent curriculum sometimes requires English teachers to explore many methods, media and teaching materials that they want to present in the classroom. Teachers must provide learning activity options to achieve learning objectives in the curriculum

"One of the challenges is we need to be skilled and creative to execute the learning process."
(Teacher)

In the learning process, the teacher provides several learning activities in one meeting, and for one chapter, there are four meetings to discuss one material. Thus, the teacher's ability to be creative in carrying out teaching activities is truly tested.

For example, teacher used a origami paper to introduce the students to colors and shapes for 1st grade students. The students are asked by the teacher to identify the color and cut the paper based on the name of shapes, like triangle, square, rectangle. Consequently, teacher instructed the students to form a house with the shapes made by the students and could choose the color by themselves, then stuck it on the paper with glue. The students seemed excited to follow the activity until the rest of the learning process. The strategy used by the subject is also mentioned in a research conducted by Deni and Fahriany (2020), that using real object to learn vocabulary for young learners is more effective and more engaging for the students.

3.2. Students' Characteristics

The student's character also plays a big role in determining what methods the teacher will use, so this is also considered challenging. The independent curriculum applies a differentiation system, where this must also take into account the character of the students being taught.

"(As a teacher) We need to be detailed in creating differentiation lesson plans for the students."

Apart from that, boredom cannot be separated from the student's character. Hashemi and Azizinezhad (2011) stated that young learners easily get bored and losing interest after a short period of time during the learning process. When learning goes on for a long time or the activities given have been completed, students will tend to feel bored and start doing activities outside of learning activities. This is quite a challenge to overcome for students who have the character of quickly getting bored.

For this, teachers overcome this by providing media that their students like, such as playing games and watching videos.

"They tend to get bored quickly. When the lesson has been going on for 20 minutes, they will leave their seats to go for a walk (looking for new activities)."

Based on the observation in one of the classes in the 1st grade, some of the students are easily get distracted by their friends or surroundings. Moreover, there are special cases where there are one or two students who find it quite difficult to follow the learning activities that were initially planned by the teacher. Therefore, teachers must think spontaneously to find other activities that this special student can do outside of the main activity. When carrying out two learning activities and having to monitor both, sometimes the teacher's focus becomes divided. So, teachers must be sensitive in guiding all their students to facilitate their needs based on the character of each student.

Moreover, Oktavia et al. (2022) found out that young learners' motivation to learn will be affected by their inconsistent characteristic, where they are sometimes demotivated during the learning process although the other day they would be cooperative to follow the learning process. This behavior was also found in the class where some students would not follow the teacher during the class completely because they considered it as not-fun or they were just not feeling to learn that day. So, teacher must be ready to handle students' inconsistent behavior and could identify the problem of each students in the class immediately during the class.

4. Conclusion

In summary, there are some challenges in teaching English at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco. One significant challenge is the demand for creativity and teaching skills, particularly when implementing the independent curriculum. The freedom granted by this curriculum necessitates teachers to explore diverse methods, media, and teaching materials to engage students effectively. This requires a high level of creativity to execute the learning process successfully. Another challenge is managing the diverse characteristics of students, which is crucial in implementing a differentiated instruction system. Teachers need to create detailed lesson plans that consider individual student characteristics, addressing issues such as boredom and the need for alternative activities. The study also highlights the importance of addressing the unique needs of students who may find it challenging to follow the planned activities.

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