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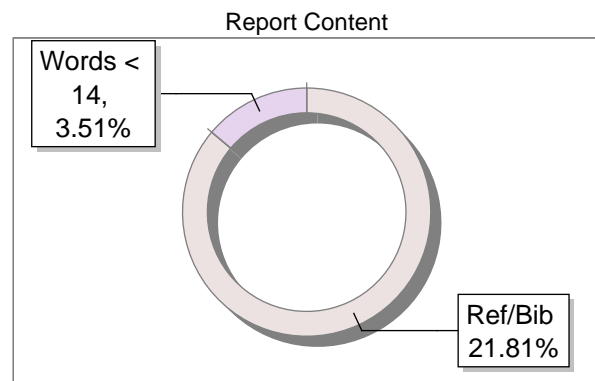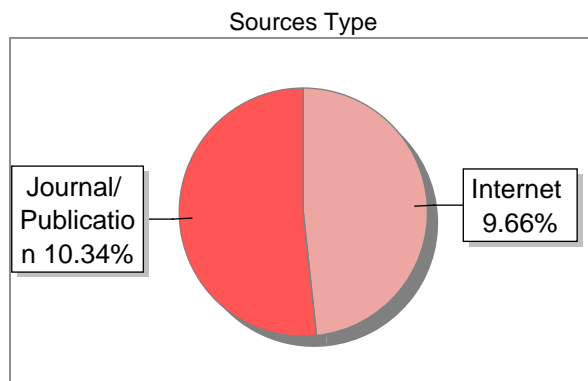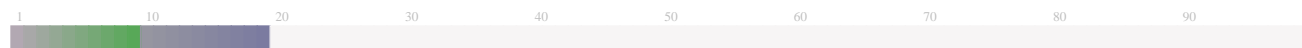
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IN-SERVICE TEACHERS' PROBLEMS IN DEVELOPING ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

In-service teachers are required to fulfil responsibilities for administrative and non-administrative stuff. However, there are some teachers who developed English materials in the form of textbooks for young learners. These teachers were involved in this study on developing English materials for elementary school students. This research is aimed at revealing the in-service teachers' problems in developing the materials into English textbooks for young learners and their solutions. This research involved seven in-service teacher authors developing English textbooks in some private elementary schools in Yogyakarta city. It applied qualitative research method. The data collection technique used a questionnaire containing open-ended questions. It revealed the data on the teachers' profiles, their experience and reflection in developing the English materials for young learners, the teachers' problems in developing English textbooks and their solutions. The data were put into categories to help achieve the research objective. From the study it was found out that the problems in developing English materials are related to the material selection, language points suitable for young learners, presentation of the materials. The research subjects set these strategies to solve the problems faced during the materials development by sharing and discussion, supervision, finding other existing resources, and creating their own materials.

Keywords: *Development; in-service teachers; materials; problems; textbook*

ABSTRAK

Guru dalam jabatan harus memenuhi tanggung jawab yang sifatnya administratif dan non-administratif. Masih terbatas guru yang mengembangkan materi bahasa Inggris dalam bentuk buku teks. Para guru ini mengembangkan buku teks bahasa Inggris untuk siswa sekolah dasar. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap permasalahan guru dalam mengembangkan materi menjadi buku teks bahasa Inggris untuk siswa sekolah dasar, dan solusi mereka untuk problem yang dihadapi. Penelitian ini melibatkan tujuh penulis guru tetap yang mengembangkan buku teks bahasa Inggris di beberapa sekolah dasar swasta di kota Yogyakarta. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif. Teknik pengumpulan data menggunakan angket dengan pertanyaan terbuka. Data dikategorisasikan berdasar tema. Dari penelitian diketahui bahwa permasalahan dalam pengembangan materi bahasa Inggris berkaitan dengan materi, poin kebahasaan, penyajian materi. Subyek penelitian menetapkan strategi sharing dan berdiskusi, supervisi, memanfaatkan sumber materi lain yang ada, dan membuat sendiri materinya.

Kata Kunci: *Bahan ajar; buku teks; guru dalam jabatan; masalah; pengembangan materi*

INTRODUCTION

The role of English as a global lingua franca has made its early introduction in the educational curricula of many countries including Indonesia indispensable. In multilingual contexts, where English is often a second or foreign language, the quality of teaching materials becomes a pivotal factor in effective language acquisition (Maria & Ekaterina, 2021; Sánchez, 2020). Elementary education serves as the foundation for young learners' linguistic and cognitive development (Castek et al., 2023), and hence, the need for well-structured and contextually appropriate English textbooks is critical. However, the task of developing such textbooks is often fraught with challenges (Fikriyani et al., 2022), especially for in-service teachers who are typically responsible for this crucial aspect of curriculum design.

The development of effective English textbooks for elementary school students is a critical component of early language education. High-quality textbooks provide structured learning experiences, engaging content, and scaffolding that supports the diverse needs of young learners (de Oliveira et al., 2023; Wardini et al., 2023). However, in-service teachers often face numerous challenges in creating these educational resources, particularly when they are responsible for developing materials or textbooks (Tomlinson, 2023) alongside their teaching responsibilities.

Nationally, there has been development in teaching of English for young learners (Zein, 2017; Kaltsum, 2016). In 1993, it was a local content in elementary school. It was provided with standards as KTSP was implemented in 2006. English was only taught at grade 4,5, and 6. The school had to set its own standards for lower grades if teaching it. In 2013 the status of English was shifted to extra-curricular subject, elective one. There was no more guideline and support from the government (Meisani & Musthafa, 2019). Afterward, it was not taught officially in the elementary school following the government policy (2023).

Like many elementary school in the beginning of the launch of the Indonesian government' educational policy in teaching English to young learners, private elementary schools also provide the English lesson. When the government issued the policy not to teach English to elementary school students, private elementary schools in Yogyakarta city also keep on teaching English to their students. They support introducing English early to young learners, and this becomes one of the strengths of the private elementary schools in Yogyakarta introducing English to young learners.

The development of materials in the form of English textbooks is a long process. Only a small number of in-service teachers participated in realizing it. They were involved in the writing stages that made the textbooks reach the students at school. They had the experiences in developing English materials into textbooks, the lessons to teach the students.

Despite the recognition of the importance of high-quality teaching materials, there is a paucity of research specifically addressing the challenges faced by teachers in developing English materials or textbooks (Hall & Gaynor, 2020; Hidayah et al., 2021; Mukundan, 2022). Most existing studies have focused on pre-service teacher training or the efficacy of various teaching materials (Afalla & Fabelico, 2020; Chan et al., 2021, 2021; Napanoy et al., 2021; Syamdianita & Cahyono, 2021) without

delving into the practical issues encountered by practicing educators. This gap in the literature underscores the necessity of investigating the unique problems that in-service teachers encounter, including constraints related to time, resources, and professional development opportunities.

The development of effective teaching materials is essential for several reasons. Firstly, well-designed textbooks can provide a structured framework for both teachers and students, ensuring a coherent progression of language skills (Mithans & Grmek, 2020). Secondly, such materials can cater to the diverse needs of young learners, offering differentiated instruction to accommodate varying proficiency levels and learning styles (Setiawan & Qamariah, 2023). Lastly, textbooks that are contextually relevant and engaging can significantly enhance students' motivation and interest in learning English, thereby improving educational outcomes (Syairofi et al., 2022).

In-service teachers often face a myriad of challenges when tasked with developing English textbooks. These include limited time due to heavy teaching loads, insufficient training in material development, and a lack of access to up-to-date resources and technology (Alalwan et al., 2020; Chew & Cerbin, 2021; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021). Additionally, teachers may struggle with aligning textbook content with national educational standards and the specific linguistic needs of their students (Christison & Murray, 2021; Hwa et al., 2020; Scott & Husain, 2021). These issues are compounded in multilingual environments where the linguistic background of students can vary widely, necessitating tailored approaches to language instruction.

Addressing the problems faced by in-service teachers in developing English textbooks is crucial for enhancing the quality of English language education at the elementary level. By shedding light on these challenges, this study aims to contribute to the development of more effective support mechanisms for teachers, ultimately benefiting young learners in multilingual contexts.

METHOD
Research Design

This study applied qualitative research method (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). It worked with data obtained containing teachers' reflections on their problems of developing English materials to teach young learners and their solutions.

Research Participants

The participants were purposively sampled among English teachers in islamic private schools in Yogyakarta. They consist of seven in-service English teachers as developers of English materials (textbooks) of elementary school of all levels (grade1 to 6). They consisted of one male and six female teachers. All are English education department graduates. They were invited to develop English textbooks by a teacher association. They worked collaboratively in developing the materials for the required textbooks. They developed a set of textbooks for elementary school students. The textbooks contain 6 levels.

The participants of this study have different background in English materials development. One of the teachers involved in this study did his debut in developing English materials for young learners (elementary school students). Others have

prior experiences in English materials development, either individually or in groups as authors of another set of English textbooks for young learners.

Data Collecting Technique and Research Instrument

The data collection techniques used a questionnaire containing open-ended questions. The questions were on the in-service teachers' profile, on their experience and their reflection in developing English textbooks for elementary school students, their problems and solutions related to developing English materials into textbooks (Rahayuningsih, 2016; Wahyuningsih et al., 2021; Tomlinson, 2012).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed qualitatively (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). They were reduced, put into categories and displayed before drawn into conclusion to help achieve the research objectives (Tomlinson, 2016; Uysal & Yavuz, 2015).

FINDINGS

Teacher's Profile

There were 7 research participants i.e. English teacher who developed the English textbooks for elementary school students. They consist of one male and six female teachers. All are English education department graduates. They are from different range of age (28.6% above 40 years old, 28.6% 36-40 years old, 28.6% 31-35 years old,14.3% 26-30 years old). Recently, they represent author teachers from phase A (grade 1 and 2), B (grade 3 and 4) and C (grade 5 and 6) of elementary schools. Many of them (57.1%) have 6-10 years of teaching experience, some with 10-15 years of teaching (28.6%) and the rest with more than 20 years of teaching (14.3%). The details on their age and work experience are depicted in Figure 1, Figure 2.
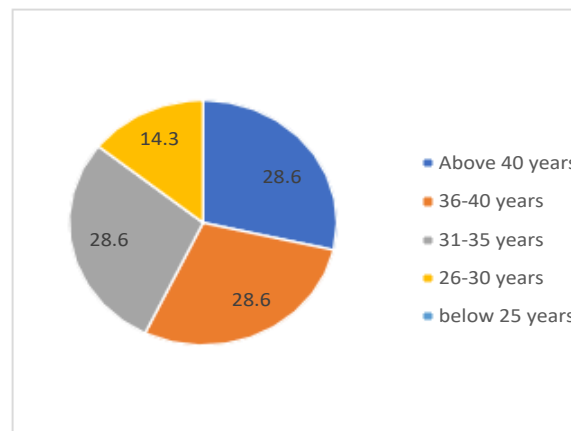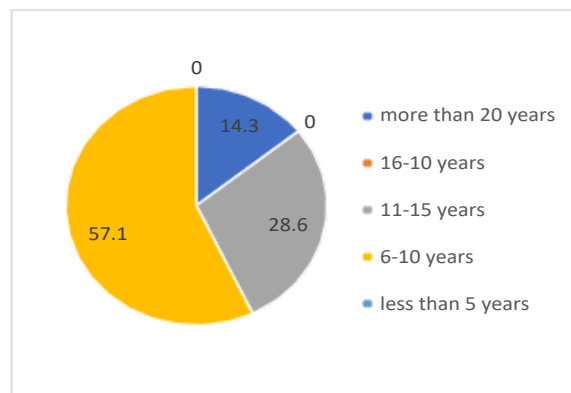

Figure 1. Range of Teacher's Age

Figure 2. Length of working experience

Nationally, there has been development in teaching of English for young learners. In 1993, it was a local content in elementary school. It was provided with standards as KTSP was implemented in 2006. English was only taught at grade 4,5, and 6. The school had to set its own standards for lower grades if teaching it. In 2013 the status of English was shifted to extra-curricular subject, elective one. There was no more guideline and support from the government (Meisani & Musthafa, 2019). Afterward it was not taught officially in the elementary school following the government policy (2023). This is one of the reasons why the materials development is on demand.

Teachers are encouraged to develop their teaching materials. Teachers in this study did the process of developing English materials starting from attending initial sharing forums, drafting, presenting, getting some feedbacks, revising, and finalizing the materials.

Teacher's Problems in Developing the English Materials
Material selection

The teachers intensively cooperate and collaborate especially with peer colleague teachers, and editors. They have their mastery on the materials of English for young learners, but they stated that they need to determine which materials are suitable, interesting to be presented as the content of the English textbooks for elementary school students. They did the activity of adapting and/or creating the teaching materials. It is in order that the materials can facilitate the students to learn different language skills, vocabulary, and English structures. They enjoy the process of developing the materials although it is challenging.

...The problem is finding the material that is suitable for grade 2 students and delivering the material coherently. ...young learners are expected to learn actively, to learn with fun, and ...to express ideas with something learned from the material. The book is expected to maximize listening, reading, writing and speaking skills (Teacher 3).

It was very challenging, because we had to look for texts that were appropriate to the target and develop tasks that were also appropriate for the students (Teacher 4).

Moreover, based on the data collected the teachers found that it was challenging to develop English materials suitable and functional for young learners (Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3, Teacher 6). One of the teachers highlighted the efforts to find authentic audio and video materials (Teacher 4). It is the fact that English is taught as a foreign language in Indonesia. Students and teachers hardly find people use English around them. Teaching and learning English are mainly based on textbooks

The followings are some of their statements associated with the teachers' problems in developing English materials for young learners.

Determine whether the material is applicable in everyday life (Teacher 3).

The biggest difficulty is finding authentic audio or video sources that match the material (Teacher 4).

Language Points

Another problem is related to the language points suitable for young learners. Teacher 5 stated that the variety of language structures in the materials should be suitable with students' level (grade). The focus on language structure must not be too complicated or too much, especially for younger learners (grade 1, 2, and 3).

…the material (theme) that has been previously formulated in the sequence of materials is quite appropriate to the class…. there is grammar that I think is appropriate to the material (theme) but in fact, it is not appropriate for the class (it should be introduced in upper grades). For example, the sequence of the materials as the guideline for developing English materials for young learners includes using _past tense_ for third graders (Teacher 5) …

Presentation of the Materials

The third problem is the presentation of the materials in the textbooks produced. The process of developing the English materials for young learners were intended for different graders (level 1 to 6). Also, the materials were developed by several teachers as authors. It was decided in the sharing forum that the teacher authors used a template of presenting the materials so the organizations of the textbook content were easy to follow as well. How the materials are presented in each section of the textbook, what language skills are to deliver first, etc. are some of the considerations. The results are not that was expected.

This is what Teacher 4 stated…
…there were differences among the authors regarding the book template that has been agreed. Or maybe, it was because there was a new template to apply, which the authors were not yet familiar with…. so the material presentation in the content of a certain grade and the one in another set of materials of different grades was not the same.

In relation to the illustrations, there are several illustrations that are not as expected by the author due to limited time and communication. And for the revision process, there is a request for revision from the author but in the dummy book and in the printed book there are still errors that the author asks to be revised (Teacher 5).

DISCUSSION

Compared to the results of the present study, other research related to materials development revealed these findings. Student teachers faced some challenges in developing material. Those include (1) the lack of student teachers knowledge on students' field (2) the lack of supervision time, and (3) the confusion in selecting media for the students (Nordlund & Norberg, 2020). Underlining the second finding, the problem in different presentation of the materials can be associated with the lack of supervision or monitoring on how the materials were developed. This can also be related to the activity of editing and proofreading that is important before the materials are produced.

Furthermore, there are also three main problems found in other research setting. The problems are those the teachers face in developing learning resources. They are: 1) the technical ability to use tools and devices to create digital learning resources; 2) the strategy of organizing learning materials to be applied to learning resources; and 3) the lack of skills in managing learning materials to be applied to digital learning resources (Sulistiyo et al., 2020).

For the problems encountered during the process of developing English materials, teachers make their solutions. The participants of the recent study have some strategies. The process of developing English materials in the form of textbook is dynamic and demands collaboration and cooperation with other related parties. It needs to involve not only textbook author teachers, but also TEYL experts, editors, illustrators, and publishers. The teacher participants of this study see the importance of sharing and discussion (T2, T3), supervision (T1, T3, T4, T5, T7), other existing resources (T2, T4, T6), and creating materials (T4). In the process of developing the materials, the in-service teachers had the sessions with colleagues where they did their presentation on the materials developed and they got feedback from other author teachers. They were also guided by supervisors from English Language Education Study Program. In many parts of the textbook, they created their own materials. They got inspired by observing materials from existing textbooks or from their colleagues.

…discuss with English teachers, …check the content of other school handbooks (Teacher 2)

…consult with experts (English lecturers for teaching English for children), with colleagues, …look for references on Google (Teacher 3).

…search from all possible resources, if we can't find it, we make it ourselves and we consult with the editor to see whether it is suitable and suitable for use (Teacher 4).

To enhance the quality of learning, materials for the students need to be provided and improved from time to time. Several aspects need to be considered for that reason (Ilmiddinovich, 2020; Mudra, 2020). The effort by teacher authors are of significance to sustain this point of learning and teaching activities. The findings of the study hopefully can contribute significantly to those priorly obtained from the proceeding investigations on teaching English for young learners regarding the studies on teaching English to young learners which are very broad. They can be focused on teaching and learning at school, teaching aid, policy like curriculum, methods, professional development as well as material development (Uysal & Yavuz, 2015; Nordlund & Norberg, 2020; Sulistiyo et al., 2020; Ilmiddinovich, 2020; Mudra, 2020)

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the challenges faced by in-service teachers in developing English textbooks for young learners, particularly in selecting appropriate materials, determining suitable language points, and presenting the content effectively. The research underscores the importance of collaboration and resourcefulness among teachers, as evidenced by the strategies employed to overcome these challenges, such as sharing and discussion, seeking supervision, utilizing existing resources, and creating their own materials. These findings emphasize the need for ongoing support and professional development for teachers engaged in textbook development to ensure the creation of high-quality educational resources for young learners.

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