

Challenges and Solutions in Teaching English at the Elementary School Level: A Case Study at SDN Pabelan 03

Bayumegawira Kusuma Wardana¹, Muamaroh Muamaroh²,

^{1,2}Department of English Education, University of Muhammadiyah Surakarta

email: a320220099@student.ums.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received 10/06/26 Revised 06/07/26 Accepted 12/07/26	<i>This study aimed to explore the challenges faced by the English teacher in the learning process and solutions to address these challenges at SDN Pabelan 03, Sukoharjo Regency, Central Java. A qualitative case study method was used to gain a deeper understanding of the teacher's classroom teaching experiences across several grade levels. Classroom observation was conducted at the 1st, 3rd, and 6th grades, while semi structured interview was carried out by the writer to the English teacher as research participant. The data were analyzed using qualitative methods, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The three main challenges faced are differences in students' language abilities, variation in students' learning motivation, and limited supporting learning facilities. In response, the teacher implemented three strategies to address the issue: adapting material to the students' abilities through simple explanations and using translation to Indonesian, increasing student learning motivation through reward and educative consequences, and utilizing available resources such as internet facility and digital tools (Canva, and ChatGPT) to create supplementary teaching materials.</i>
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I. INTRODUCTION

English language learning was a crucial aspect of developing students' communication skills as part of English language instruction in elementary school, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where students were generally introduced to English in the classroom (Imran et al., 2024). The English language had long been taught throughout the country since it was introduced in Indonesian elementary schools as a local content subject. In this particular education level, learners were in the middle of a developmental process where the ability to learn a foreign language effectively could be obtained through meaningful contexts (Gonzalez et al., 2023). Therefore, this study aimed to show that the primary goal of English language instruction at the elementary school level is not only to build a foundation in English but also to foster a positive attitude toward the language for future learning. However, the reality of English language teaching at the elementary school level could not be denied; teachers faced various teaching challenges every day.

Elementary school English teachers faced many challenges, and these challenges varied depending on their environment. Differences students' English language abilities, limited

resources, and varying levels of motivation presented challenges that required significant and ongoing adjustments to support the learning process (Rasmin et al., 2024; Yağizel & Çelik, 2023). Every difficulty in the context of teaching presented its own challenges; Indonesia faced its own unique challenges and pressures in English language instruction. Under the Merdeka curriculum, teachers had the authority to select teaching materials; this increased their workload and required flexibility in teaching methods (Gunawan, 2023). In addition, many schools were still hampered by a lack of learning facilities and educational resources. Low-quality teaching materials, a lack of supplementary learning resources, and the absence of textbooks could hinder the English language learning process and required the implementation of innovative and flexible teaching strategies (Amiruddin & Syafitri, 2023).

In addition to structural and material factors, teachers' professional competence and expertise had also been shown to play a significant role in the process of teaching English in elementary schools. Teachers had to adjust their teaching methods to match the students' language abilities, motivate the students and utilize various resources wisely. To fulfill these responsibilities, pedagogical skills and creativity were required to address various challenges (Wibowo & Wirza, 2025). Teachers frequently have to devise the necessary techniques and teaching aids themselves, especially in the absence of the latter (Isaee et al., 2023). Therefore, the combination of multiple contextual and institutional as well as personal factors makes the process of teaching rather complicated and challenging.

Previous studies had highlighted the various challenges faced by elementary school English teachers in various educational settings. For an example, English teachers in elementary school in East Lombok faced problems of insufficient training and equipment as well as lack of parental support (Albustomi et al., 2024). Similarly, the teachers in Nias struggled with overcrowded classes, students' low motivation and lack of resources (Hulu, 2024). Outside Indonesia, EFL teachers in Ecuador reported problems in implementing the curriculum due to the diversity in learning abilities in one classroom (Alvarez et al., 2025), and English teachers in Colombia pointed out that the learning resources were not in line with the contemporary teaching policy (Gonzalez et al., 2023). Another issue identified was that the textbook exercises used at bilingual primary schools were focused on form and not on communication (Pirzad et al., 2021). It was clear that English teachers at elementary schools all over faced difficulties regarding students' different needs, resources, and teaching contexts, which, though manifested differently across contexts, required teachers to adapt flexibly in order to make effective English language teaching.

To address these challenges, the adaptation of materials had been widely adopted as a practical and effective strategy. According to Amiruddin and Syafitri (2023), this approach had been widely used by EFL teachers in Indonesia as a strategy for adapting teaching materials to the classroom situation, particularly when published materials did not sufficiently meet students' needs. Intang et al. (2024) found that learning materials relevant to the learning context could improve student achievement and engagement, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction at the elementary school level. Rasmin et al. (2024) found that teachers had flexibly applied various strategies to improve students' reading comprehension and motivation, suggesting that teachers' flexibility in adapting their teaching practices to the classroom context could also play a significant role in the effectiveness of instruction.

However, although the literature in this field had been growing, most studies focused on the evaluation of textbooks or teachers' perceptions of English language teaching, and tended not to examine classroom practices. The challenges teachers faced in the classroom and how they address them had received relatively little attention. Given that the challenges teachers faced depended on their specific context, there was a need to observe teachers' actual behavior in their classrooms, because only by examining the learning process in the classroom could we identify

practical solutions that are often overlooked in broader survey findings or sidelined by more policy-oriented studies. Therefore, this highlighted the need for more investigation to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers cope with difficulties in the classroom or maintain an effective learning process in various contexts of education.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to fill a gap in the literature by examining the teaching experiences of the English teacher at SDN Pabelan 03 in Sukoharjo Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. This study focuses on challenges the teacher faced when teaching English in elementary schools and the solutions to these challenges. The results were expected to offer practical insights for elementary school English teachers about addressing challenges and adjusting to the needs and resources of students in their classroom. The study was based on the experiences of one teacher in various grade-levels, providing a detailed and contextually rich view of the actualities of the English language in Indonesian elementary schools. This study contributes to existing research on the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at the elementary school level by providing in-depth observational data on how the teacher actually addresses these challenges in practice. Rather than relying primarily on teachers' self-reports, questionnaire data, or textbook analyses of the needs required to address such challenges, this study used direct classroom observations and interviews with the teacher to collect data on how these challenges were addressed as part of her actual EFL teaching practice. This approach offers a new contribution and a deeper understanding through observation-based research. Furthermore, the study involves the teacher who instructs students across various grades (Grades 1, 3, and 6), covering more than one level of ability and motivation; this is highlighted as another new contribution of this study toward understanding EFL teaching within the actual context of elementary schools.

II. METHODS

This study employed a case study design (Creswell, 2013) to examine the challenges faced by an English teacher at SDN Pabelan 03 and the strategies she implemented in her daily teaching practice. The case study design is considered appropriate for this research because it allows for an in-depth examination of a contextual phenomenon in a real-world setting and provides rich and detailed insights into classroom practices that cannot be captured through quantitative approaches.

The participant in this study was the English teacher, referred to as AF to protect her privacy. She is a graduate of the English Education Program at one of the state Universities in Central Java and had approximately two and a half years of teaching experience. She was the only English teacher at SDN Pabelan 03 and had experience teaching all grade levels. The participant was selected because she is the only English teacher and is directly involved in the research focus, which is experience in implementing English language instruction across various grade levels and ability levels. As only one participant met the sampling criteria, no further recruitment process was necessary. The researcher contacted the eligible participant directly, explained the aims and procedures of the study, and obtained her informed consent after providing her with complete information prior to data collection. This study also followed the required ethical procedures, including obtaining a research approval letter signed by the Associate Dean of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, which was submitted to the school principal prior to data collection.

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. These two instruments were chosen because interviews allowed the researcher to capture the teacher's reflections and reported practices, while classroom observations provided direct evidence of her actual teaching behaviors, so that the two data sources could be triangulated to strengthen the credibility of the findings. To gain an initial understanding of teaching practices and teachers' perspectives, semi-structured interviews were conducted in the early stages, each lasting about 20 minutes. The interview guide was developed based on the research questions

and was validated by the research supervisor prior to use, to ensure its relevance to the study's focus on the teacher's challenges and teaching strategies. The process was conducted in Indonesian to facilitate communication, recorded in audio format with the participants' permission, then transcribed and translated for analysis. During the academic year 2025/2026, the researcher conducted observations in classrooms for students from Grade 1, Grade 3, and Grade 6 as a non-participant, conducting observations in each classroom twice, taking about 45 minutes in each class over a period of two weeks. The observations examined how the teacher employed a range of strategies to accommodate the students' varying proficiency levels and motivational needs, as well as how the students interacted with one another and with the teacher. Field notes were kept throughout the observations to capture contextual information that could not be recorded through audio, such as the students' reactions and the teacher's immediate responses.

Data analysis followed the three-stage model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, all collected data were transcribed, reviewed, and organized based on emerging themes relevant to the research questions. In this study, interview transcripts and observation field notes were coded into categories such as students' differing language abilities, variation in learning motivation, limited learning facilities, and the strategies the teacher used to address these challenges. In the data display stage, the reduced data were presented in narrative form to integrate findings from both interview and observation data. The data were organized based on the two main topics that were the focus of this study: the challenge that teacher faced during the teaching process and the solutions employed by the English teacher to address these challenges. The third phase concluded with an analysis of the findings based on recurring patterns and emerging trends in the collected data, which were then confirmed with the participants through a member-checking process.

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, the four standards established by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were applied. Methodological triangulation and member checking verification were conducted to ensure credibility. A detailed description of the classroom environment and conditions was provided to ensure transferability. An audit trail of field notes, transcripts, and the coding process was systematically documented to enhance dependability. The researchers' reflexivity and the establishment of interpretations based on empirical evidence were employed to enhance confirmability. . In terms of researcher reflexivity, the researcher had no prior personal relationship with the participant or the school, having only met AF for the purpose of this study, which allowed the data collection and interpretation process to be approached from an outsider perspective. In addition, the interview guide was validated by the research supervisor prior to use, which helped minimize potential researcher bias during data collection.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study were obtained from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with AF, the English teacher at SDN Pabelan 03. The results are presented in two main sections: (1) Challenge encountered in teaching English at the elementary level, and (2) solutions implemented by the teacher in response to these challenges.

Challenges in Teaching English

Differences in Students' Language Abilities

The first challenge identified was the difference in students' English language abilities across the three grade levels. During classroom observations, it was evident that within the same class, there were significant differences in students' English proficiency levels. Some students were

able to understand instructions, answer questions, and complete assignments on their own, while others need repeated explanations and guidance from the teacher. The disparity is consistently clear in Grades 1, 3, and 6. The weaknesses observed at Grade 3 level are more visible since some learners do not even recognize letters of the alphabet or simple English words. This had led to an imbalance in the availability of learning materials, as nearly all the books used in class contained a lot of text.

"The problem lies in the fact that students in the same classroom have varying degrees of proficiency. Some may be able to grasp things fast while there are others who are having difficulty. One of the problems that are more evident among the Grade 3 students is the inability to read. Although they are expected to be able to read already, some of them are not able to do so while there are others who are still unable to distinguish letters." (Mrs. AF)

The teacher then had to individualize instruction for the students that were having difficulty which, in turn, held the lesson up.

Variation in Students' Learning Motivation

The second challenge was related to motivation to learn. It was clear from the observation that while some students exhibited motivation to learn in the classroom by being active participants, completing their assignments promptly, and taking initiative, others were quite passive, not responsive, and required constant encouragement from the teacher to become active participants in anything they did. This will led to disparities within the classroom, where teachers were faced with the difficult choice between teaching the student and trying to inspire the student. Based on observations, it was evident that some students demonstrated enthusiasm in class through active participation, prompt completion of assignments, and showing initiative, creating an imbalance within the classroom where the teacher was continuously balancing instructional delivery and student motivation.

"Some students are extremely motivated, they even do their homework at home before I even ask them to. Then there are students who do not want to do their homework at all. This type of thing occasionally causes the learning process to be unbalanced; some students simply lack the drive." (Mrs. AF)

Due to this situation, the teacher had to continuously adjust her approach to keep the less motivated students engaged without slowing down the learning progress of those who were already active.

Limited Learning Facilities

The third challenge was limited teaching resources in schools. Some students were discovered to have left their books at home and thus were unable to attend the classes. In addition, there were no visual and auditory teaching materials available, e.g. projectors, which affected on Mrs. AF's flexibility in the teaching process.

"Sometimes students forget to bring their textbooks to class, so they cannot follow the lesson properly. Usually, I ask them to share books with their classmates or pay attention to the explanation on the whiteboard. Besides that, our school has limited teaching facilities. We do not have projectors or other learning media that could make the lessons more interesting and interactive. Because of these limitations, I mostly use the textbooks and the whiteboard during my teaching. Although I would like to use more varied teaching media, I have to adjust my teaching to the facilities that are available." (Mrs. AF)

As a result, the limited availability of media reduce the variety of teaching approaches applied by Mrs. AF and mostly relied on conventional teaching methodology.

Solutions Applied by the Teacher

Adapting Materials Based on Students' Ability

The teacher used a variation of instructional materials based upon students' varying language abilities. This was done by making explanations simple, giving more guidance to students who had difficulty in learning and using the Indonesian language to help them understand when needed. When students were struggling, she gave repeated explanations, using more accessible language and a slower pace.

"In adapting the material, I first ask myself whether the students can follow the material or not. If it is too difficult, I re-explain slowly, if the student cannot, I first translate the meaning into Indonesian, or if it is still very difficult, I give simplified examples first so that they can try themselves." (Mrs. AF)

The teacher modified the difficulty level of the content of the lesson, offered support in Indonesian language (L1) for those who had low proficiencies to enable them to follow along with the lesson's content.

Increasing Students' Motivation and Educative Consequences

To address the issue of variations in learning motivation, the teacher employed positive reinforcement and educational consequences. Observation of classroom activities indicated that positive reinforcement was observed, as praise such as "good" and "very good" was frequently heard. It was also observed that the teacher encouraged students to answer the question aloud and present it to the class to increase their interest, as well as confidence to give the answer. For unmotivated or unresponsive students, some simple consequences, such as standing in front of the class, were provided to be used as a sort of responsibility reinforcement instead of a punishment.

"I always try to create a pleasant classroom atmosphere so that students are not afraid to try. If there are students who successfully answer or pronounce words correctly, I immediately praise them in front of the class to motivate them. But if there are students who are lazy or unwilling to complete their assignments, I have no choice but to give them consequences such as standing in front of the class or being asked to step outside so that they become more responsible." (Mrs. AF)

This dual approach helped maintain classroom discipline, while also providing the interested and active students with the encouragement that they deserve.

Utilizing Available Resources

To address the challenges caused by a lack of learning materials, the teacher asked students to lend their textbooks to their classmates if they did not have their own. Moreover, the teacher used Canva and ChatGPT to prepare complementary learning materials with the former to produce graphic visual aids while the latter generated worksheets and classroom teaching materials.

"If there are students who do not bring their textbooks, I ask them to share with their seatmates first. Besides that, I also use Canva and ChatGPT to create and find additional materials that suit the conditions and needs of students in the classroom so that the lesson can still run well." (Mrs. AF)

Therefore, with the use of digital devices and group study among classmates, the teacher did not have to struggle with the school's poor provision of physical learning media and she was able to continue her lesson effectively.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that many interrelated factors can influence the implementation of English textbooks at SDN Pabelan 03, namely difference students' language abilities and readiness, learning motivation, and limitations in learning support facilities. For this implementation to be successful, teachers must employ specific strategies in guiding students so that learning objectives can be achieved. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, we conclude that the success of textbook implementation depends not only on the quality of the textbooks themselves, but also on student readiness and the efforts made by teachers.

The first challenge identified was the difference in students' English language abilities across the three grade levels. Students' English language abilities varied, as did the extent to which their literacy skills enabled them to fully understand and make use of English language learning materials at the elementary school level. This caused great difficulty for the teacher in delivering lessons to students in the same classroom. These results are consistent with the findings of Albustomi et al. (2024), who stated that students' inadequate foundational language and literacy skills affected their success in learning English at the elementary school level. In addition, Chien et al. (2025) acknowledged that elementary school teachers were often forced to adapt lesson materials due to differences in students' language abilities and vocabulary knowledge. These various studies all indicated that student diversity is a major issue in elementary-level EFL classrooms. This finding contradicted the findings of Pirzad et al. (2021), who identified the non-communicative, form-focused exercises in textbooks as the main problem in the context of bilingual schools. Additionally, Ramirez (2025) stated that the textbooks provided by the government for elementary school students were considered to focus too much on literacy skills and were insufficient for developing speaking skills. This study contradicted these views and asserted that the primary issue was the level of readiness and maturity of students in engaging with the learning material, not the content or structure of the textbook. One possible reason for this discrepancy might be related to the elementary school environment, where young students were in the early stages of developing their literacy skills and basic language abilities. This finding can also be interpreted through the lens of differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2017), a pedagogical approach that emphasizes adjusting the process, content, and delivery of instruction according to students' varying levels of readiness and ability within the same classroom. In this study, the teacher did not implement differentiation through a structured and pre-planned system, as is commonly described in formal differentiated instruction literature, but instead applied it reactively and intuitively based on direct observation of students' responses in the classroom. This suggests that the principles of differentiated instruction can be enacted informally by elementary school teachers even without specific training in differentiation, a nuance that has received limited attention in differentiated instruction research, which tends to focus on formal and planned implementation in better-resourced classrooms.

The second challenge raised in this study was student motivation. The students appeared to participate in classroom activities with varying degrees of engagement; some seemed actively involved, while others simply waited passively for the teacher to repeat the activity a second, third, and subsequent times. This result aligns with Hulu (2024) who indicated that low students' motivation in EFL classroom in Indonesia was still a common problem in Indonesian EFL classrooms. Likewise, Rasmin et al. (2024) indicated that flexible teaching methods could enhance students' involvement and participation in learning activities. It had been suggested that the learning environment and the teaching style used by the teachers are also factors affecting students' motivation, besides the individual factors. This, however, contradicted the findings of Dao et al. (2024) who concluded that songs, games, visual activities were the primary factors contributing student engagement. The primary basis of the motivation of the students in the present study was the individual disposition of students and the extent of the encouragement given by the teacher in the classroom activities. In addition, the strategies were more on classroom management and motivation support, whereas, the strategies advocated by Imran et

al. (2024) involved more a diverse range of instructional strategies that would increase engagement. However, the similarity and differences might be caused by the diverse nature of the classroom context, available resources, and the needs of the students.

The results of this study also indicated that there were serious problems in the implementation of English textbooks due to limited availability of supporting learning facilities. Limited facilities and learning materials restricted opportunities for a more diverse and dynamic learning experience. This was in line with Albustomi et al. (2024) who identified inadequate facilities as a major challenge to effective English instruction. In the same way, González et al. (2023) reported that teachers faced difficulties in carrying out the learning activities in the way that the curriculum required due to a limited resource. Unlike previous studies, most of which focused on the negative effects of teachers' limited facilities, this study showed that teachers can adapt available resources and create alternative teaching materials while remaining effective and efficient in the learning process. The teacher's ability to remain effective despite facing limited teaching facilities can be understood through the concept of teacher resilience (Zhang & Luo, 2023), which describes teachers' capacity to sustain effective functioning, adapt, and maintain commitment to instructional quality amid challenging working conditions. Rather than being hindered by the absence of supporting media such as projectors, the teacher demonstrated resilience by continuing to rely on available resources, such as textbooks and the whiteboard, while still striving to deliver meaningful lessons. This finding extends the concept of teacher resilience, which has predominantly been examined in relation to psychological wellbeing and burnout, by illustrating how resilience also manifests in everyday instructional decision-making under conditions of resource scarcity, particularly in under-resourced elementary school settings.

In response to these challenges, the teacher implemented several strategies, including adapting learning materials to students' abilities, increasing students' motivation, and utilizing available facilities and digital resources. The adaptation of learning materials through simplified explanations, additional examples, translation into Indonesian, and supplementary worksheets enabled students to better understand the content presented in the textbook. This finding is consistent with Amiruddin and Syafitri (2023), who found that teachers frequently adapt government-issued textbooks to meet students' learning needs rather than relying on them without modification. Similarly, Intang et al. (2024) reported that supplementary materials can improve students' comprehension and engagement in English learning. These studies support the idea that material adaptation is an important strategy for addressing diverse learner needs in EFL classrooms.

The results further reveal that increasing students' motivation was an essential component of the teacher's strategy. The teacher used the strategies of verbal praise, active participation by presenting in class and applying educative consequences by having the passive learners stand before the whole class to make them responsible for the learning. All the activities contributed to a conducive learning environment for the learners to interact well in the learning process. This was similar to the idea presented by Rasmin et al. (2024), whereby teachers needed to be flexible in engaging their students. It differs from Dao et al. (2024) who focused mainly on activity-based techniques, such as games and songs. In this present study, the focus was mainly on facilitating motivation through interpersonal interaction, encouragement and positive reinforcement, which appeared to be a balance between the values of encouragement and accountability for the teacher in a resource-limited context.

An additional results concerns the use digital tools such as Canva and ChatGPT by the teacher in preparing for classes and making learning materials. Through the use of the digital technology, it became possible for the teacher to produce more varied and accessible learning materials despite the lack of equipment at school. According to the results, it is worth mentioning that the teacher independently made additional learning materials and used digital means based

on her own assessment of students' needs. However, it differs from Le and Pham (2023), who argued that effective material adaptation requires extensive theoretical knowledge and formal training. In contrast, the present study suggests that teacher adaptability can also emerge from continuous reflection on classroom realities and self-directed efforts to utilize available technology, even in the absence of formal professional development programs. The teacher's initiative in independently using Canva and ChatGPT to prepare supplementary materials can be understood as an expression of teacher agency (Cong-Lem, 2021), which refers to teachers' capacity to actively make pedagogical decisions and act in response to their specific classroom context, rather than merely following predetermined procedures or formal training. This finding illustrates that teacher agency can emerge organically through self-directed engagement with available technology, even in the absence of institutional support or professional development programs focused on digital tools. This extends existing accounts of teacher agency, which have primarily examined it in relation to curriculum reform and policy enactment, by showing how agency can also be exercised at the level of everyday classroom resourcefulness.

Overall, the results revealed that the teacher greatly contributed to helping students address the challenges they encountered due to differences in English abilities, varying motivation, and limited facilities. The teacher capacity to adapt instruction, motivate students and use resources was indicative of direct response to the realities of the classroom and evidence of professional decision making. This was consistent with Muamaroh and Thoyibi (2025), who determined that teachers who were high in self-efficacy tended to be more proactive and adaptive in improving student engagement by using different strategies such as group work, motivational encouragement, and individual attention to address students' passivity.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The results showed that the teacher of SDN Pabelan 03 made a substantial contribution to addressing three main problems of English language teaching, namely differences in students' language skills, variations in motivation, and limited learning facilities, through adaptive instruction techniques such as material adaptation, positive reinforcement, and the use of digital tools like Canva and ChatGPT. From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes by illustrating how teacher agency, adaptive teaching, differentiated instruction, and teacher resilience are simultaneously enacted in the everyday practice of an elementary EFL teacher working under resource constraints, extending both the practical and conceptual understanding of English language teaching at this level. The results, however, are limited because data were gathered from a single school and single teacher, meaning the implications are limited and students' voices were not included. Based on these findings, elementary school English teachers are encouraged to continue adapting instructional materials to students' diverse language abilities while making effective use of available resources and digital technologies to support classroom learning. Schools are also encouraged to provide more adequate teaching facilities and learning resources to enhance the quality of English instruction. Furthermore, future research is encouraged to involve a larger number of teachers from different elementary schools and incorporate students' perspectives to provide a broader understanding of the challenges and effective practices in elementary EFL teaching.

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