

AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHING ENGLISH FOR YOUNG LEARNERS BY NON ENGLISH PRE- SERVICE TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This study studied how pre-service teachers without English training taught young learners at SD Antasari Medan, Indonesia. The qualitative descriptive study comprised six PGSD pre-service teachers who volunteered to teach English without formal English training. Classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis formed the basis for thematic analysis. The results demonstrated that teachers' general pedagogical skills helped them build pleasant learning spaces by greeting students, asking questions, motivating them, and planning Indonesian-English transitions. Teachers employed repetition, modelling, songs, pictures, gestures, and online resources to engage and instruct children. Due to their first language, pupils had problems reading, spelling, writing, and pronouncing words, and classroom management and evaluation were still poor. Transferable educational abilities helped, but they couldn't replace linguistic expertise. The study highlights the importance of focused professional development, improved instructional tools, and institutional support for primary school English teaching. The results also suggest that teacher education programs should better prepare non-English teachers for English instruction and encourage

reflective practice. Comprehensive and longitudinal studies should examine non-specialist teaching's long-term consequences.

Keywords: English for Young Learners; Non-specialist English Teaching; Pedagogical Competence; Pre-service Teachers; Professional Development

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL), typically aged five to twelve, has gained global significance as early exposure enhances children's phonological awareness, vocabulary, and communicative competence (Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2017). Early language learning promotes cognitive flexibility and creativity, making childhood a "golden period" for language acquisition (Brewster, Ellis, & Girard, 2002). However, effective TEYL requires teachers with sufficient English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, and sensitivity to young learners' developmental needs (Garton & Copland, 2019).

In Indonesia, English is introduced in primary schools to support global participation, yet implementation faces persistent challenges (Sulistiyo, 2016). Many schools, especially in rural areas, depend on teachers without English education backgrounds. These Pre-service teachers—volunteers who teach without formal pay or certification—play an important role but often lack confidence, language mastery, and TEYL pedagogical competence (Romadhon, Dzulfikri, & Ubaidillah, 2023; Wijayanti, Nurwinanda, & Fatah, 2022).

This study is conducted at STKIP Pangeran Antasari, located at Jl. Veteran No.1060/19, Helvetia, Kec. Sunggal, Kabupaten Deli Serdang, Sumatera Utara 20116, where many PGSD students voluntarily teach English in nearby elementary schools. Little is known about how these non-English- background Pre-service teachers manage English instruction and cope with these challenges in practice. Therefore, this study investigates their teaching practices, difficulties, and adaptive strategies.

Previous research has shown a mismatch between teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and their actual classroom practices (Puspitawati, Astuti, & Suwandi, 2023), along with persistent issues such as limited teaching materials and inadequate institutional support (Laila, Prastiwi, & Fauziati, 2020). Yet, little is known about how non English background Pre-service teachers manage English instruction and cope with these challenges in practice. Given the importance of English proficiency for global participation and educational equality (Lie, 2017), this study examines their teaching practices, difficulties, and adaptive strategies to enhance TEYL effectiveness and teacher development in Indonesia.

In Indonesian primary schools, English instruction is often handled by Pre-

service teachers without English education backgrounds. At STKIP Pangeran Antasari, many PGSD students volunteer to teach English despite limited language proficiency and pedagogical skills, leading to challenges in pronunciation, vocabulary use, and classroom interaction (Romadhon, Dzulfikri, & Ubaidillah, 2023; Puspitawati, Astuti, & Suwandi, 2023). Limited resources, lack of mentoring, and weak institutional support further hinder effective teaching, particularly in rural schools (Laila, Prastiwi, & Fauziati, 2020). Therefore, it is important to investigate how these PGSD students implement English instruction and overcome challenges to improve learning quality (Lie, 2017). This study has two research problems, namely 1) how do non-English background Pre-service teachers implement teaching English for young learners in the classroom? 2) What strategies are employed by non-English background Pre-service teachers to overcome those challenges?

This study helps PGSD students enhance their ability to teach English effectively to young learners by applying appropriate strategies in lesson planning and classroom interaction (Cameron, 2001; Garton & Copland, 2019). For teachers and future researchers, it offers insights into the practices and challenges of Preservice teachers, serving as a reference for developing training programs and further studies to improve TEYL quality among non-English-background educators (Pinter, 2017; Lie, 2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective TEYL requires teachers with strong language skills and childcentered pedagogical knowledge (Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2017). However, many Indonesian primary schools depend on non-English-background teachers who struggle with language use and classroom management (Romadhon, Dzulfikri, & Ubaidillah, 2023). Despite creativity in using songs and games (Laila, Prastiwi, & Fauziati, 2020), studies on Pre-service teachers—especially PGSD students teaching voluntarily—are still limited. This study fills that gap by exploring their teaching practices and challenges in real classroom contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to investigate how non-English-background PGSD students implemented English instruction and managed challenges as Pre-service teachers. A qualitative descriptive approach was chosen because it allowed the researcher to capture participants' real experiences and classroom practices in their natural settings without manipulating variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design suited the exploratory nature of the research questions, which aimed to describe teaching processes, strategies, and contextual challenges rather than test hypotheses (Sandelowski, 2000). The

researcher acted as a key instrument, observing lessons, conducting interviews, and interpreting data to understand the meanings behind participants' teaching behaviors within authentic school contexts.

This study took place at STKIP Pangeran Antasari, where Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar (PGSD) students often served as Pre-service teachers teaching English in nearby rural and semi-urban elementary schools. These contexts reflected typical challenges of English teaching in Indonesia, including limited resources and minimal professional guidance (Laila, Prastiwi, & Fauziati, 2020). Six PGSD students without English education backgrounds were purposively selected as participants, representing various academic fields such as general education, mathematics, and religious studies. The sample size was sufficient as data saturation was reached (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To strengthen credibility, young learners and school administrators were also involved to provide triangulated perspectives on classroom practices.

The main instrument in this study was the researcher, supported by three tools: an observation checklist, an interview guide, and a document analysis sheet. The observation checklist included key indicators such as lesson planning, use of English, classroom management, and student engagement. The interview guide contained open-ended questions about teaching challenges, strategies, and perceptions of TEYL. All instruments were reviewed and validated by two experts in English Language Education, whose feedback led to revisions in wording, sequence, and focus to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives.

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to provide a comprehensive and triangulated understanding of the participants' teaching practices. Observations captured real classroom behaviors, including instructional methods, student interaction, and learning atmosphere, while interviews offered deeper insights into teachers' perceptions, challenges, and strategies. Document analysis of lesson plans and teaching materials complemented both methods by revealing how teachers planned and assessed learning. All instruments were piloted and refined based on expert validation to ensure clarity, relevance, and consistency with the research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This combination of methods allowed cross-verification of data, enhancing both the credibility and depth of the findings.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps: familiarization, coding, theme identification, theme review, definition, and reporting. All observation notes, interview transcripts, and documents were first read repeatedly to gain an overall understanding. Codes were grouped into themes that directly addressed the research questions, such as "lesson planning and classroom strategies," "linguistic challenges," and "adaptive

teaching approaches." These themes reflected how PGSD Pre-service teachers implemented English instruction and overcame teaching difficulties. The analysis process was iterative, with themes refined and verified through data triangulation to ensure accuracy and alignment with participants' real classroom experiences.

This study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four trustworthiness criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement, multiple observations, and member checking to verify data accuracy. Transferability was achieved by providing detailed descriptions of the context and participants, while dependability was maintained through consistent procedures and peer debriefing with supervisors. Confirmability was strengthened through data triangulation, data transcription was done to minimize researcher bias and ensure findings reflected participants' authentic experiences.

FINDINGS

This study was carried out at SD Antasari Medan, an elementary school situated near STKIP Pangeran Antasari, Jl. Veteran No.1060/19, Helvetia, Kec. Sunggal, Kabupaten Deli Serdang, Sumatera Utara. The study concentrated on analysing the methods employed by pre-service teachers from PGSD (Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar) with non-English backgrounds in delivering English instruction to young learners. The school was a typical Indonesian primary school where volunteer teachers who had not been formally trained in English taught English to elementary school students. This is a problem that many schools in similar rural and semi-urban areas of Indonesia encounter.

The main data for this study were gathered from videos of classroom observations, which were then transcribed word for word to make it easier to do a thorough analysis. The transcribed video data offered thorough documentation of authentic classroom practices, encompassing teacher-student interactions, instructional language utilization, and pedagogical strategies. The data were examined through thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, incorporating systematic coding and theme identification methodologies. The analysis was bolstered by semi-structured interview data from the pre-service teachers (Miss Agus Jayanti and Sir Martin), which provided profound insights into their pedagogical philosophies, perceived obstacles, and adaptive strategies. This triangulation of observational and interview data facilitated a comprehensive understanding of how non-English background preservice teachers managed the intricacies of instructing young learners in genuine classroom environments. The table below shows the pre-service teachers who took part in this study and the main results from True Video Recording.

Table 1 Classroom Observation

No	Pre-Service Teacher	Key Findings	Examples from Transcript
1	Miss Agus	A. Teacher-Student Interactions: Greeting & Rapport Building Boyd et al., 2020	T: "Hello. Good morning student" S: "Good morning miss" T: "How are you today?" S: "I'm fine thank you miss"
		B. Instructional Language Use: Language Repetition Nation (2020-2024)	T: Oke. Benda-benda yang ada di rumah. Oke. Benda-benda yang ada di rumah. Oke, object in our house itu dibagi menjadi yang empat. Oke. Yang pertama adalah living room. S: Living room. T: Sama-sama baca dulu yang keras suaranya. T&S: Living room.
2	MISS NISA	C. Teaching Strategies: Ice-Breaking Activity Kadek Bagus Rusman (2022)	T: Bisa biar semangat dulu. Oke. Semangat, semangat semangat. Oke kita sama-sama bilang musik baru musiknya hidup. Kalau enggak enggak hidup dia. Oke. One two three music. S: AraSamsam arasamsam guli guli guli guli guri ram samsang arang samsang arang samsang guli guli guli guli ram samsam arari arari guri guri guri guri guri ram Samsam arari arari guri guri guri guri guri ramsamsam T: oke akan cepat sedikit S: AraSamsam arasamsam guli guli guli guli guri ram samsang arang samsang arang samsang guli guli guli guli ram samsam arari arari guri guri guri guri guri ram Samsam arari arari guri guri guri guri guri ramsamsam T: Oke, are you happy? S: Happy
		A. Teacher-Student Interactions: Direct Questioning Gunawan, A. M. R. et al. (2021)	T: "Di dalam bedroom ada apa?" S: "Kamar tidur" T: "Hah? Ada tempat tidur. Tempat tidur. Berarti dia Bed"
		B. Instructional	T: Oke, selain living room, ada apa lagi

	Language Use: Language Repitation Walsh (2020)	yang ada di ruangan rumah? Tempat tidur, bahasa Inggrisnya itu ada bedroom. Boleh sama-sama kita bilang bedroom. T&S: Bedroom. T: Oke. Di dalam bedroom ada apa? S: AC. T: Ada AC. Selain tempat tidur pasti ada apa? S: Pilow T: Hem? Pillow Oke. Pillow apa pillow? S: bantal.
	C. Teaching Strategies: Code-Switching Macaro (2020)	T: Didalam bedroom ada apa? S: Kamar tidur T: Hah? Ada tempat tidur. Tempat tidur. Berarti dia Bed. Bilang sama-sama ya. 1 2 3 bilang Bed. S: Bad
3	Sir Martin A. Teacher-Student Interactions: Motivational Interaction Martin & Collie (2021)	T: " Kalau kamu masih semangat, give for yourself. Tepuk tangan dulu, clap your hand " Students clap T: "Oke, we continue lesson"
	B. Instructional Language Use: Language Repitation Mercer dan Dörnyei (2020)	T: Biasanya kita kalau di kamar mandi ada lihat benda apa saja? kamu mandi pakai apa? S: Shower T: No. You can to clean your body with? soap atau sabun. Sabun atau soap . Coba kita baca sama-sama. Soap S&T: soap
	C. Teaching Strategies: VISUAL & MULTIMODAL STRATEGIES Jewitt et al. (2021)	T: Ya, ini adalah benda-benda di dapur ya. Apa contoh? Lihat nih. Sini nih. Lihat. Ini adalah contoh suasana di dapur ada banyak benda. We have a fridge, we have a table, we have a stove. Ya, banyak sekali. Ini adalah contoh ruangan di dapur tadi.

The pre-service teachers at SD Antasari Medan encountered multiple interrelated challenges in delivering English instruction to young learners. The main problem was that students didn't know the alphabet or how to pronounce words well enough. This was especially true for Grade 1 students who were

moving up from kindergarten. They could recite the alphabet but had trouble writing, spelling, and telling letters apart, which made it hard for them to learn new words and how to say them. Strong interference from the Indonesian language made this problem worse, as students used Indonesian phonetic rules on English words, like saying "cet" instead of "cat." Managing the classroom was also a big problem, especially with younger students who had trouble paying attention during lessons. In addition, the teachers faced limitations due to inadequate pedagogical preparation and assessment practices, necessitating an initial focus on fundamental skills such as alphabet mastery, spelling, and pronunciation prior to assessing advanced language competencies, while also acknowledging the necessity for professional English teacher assistance in educational institutions.

The table below shows what Miss Agus Jayanti and Sir Martin said in their interviews about the problems they had and the ways they taught English to young learners.

Table 2 Pre-service Teacher Interview

NO	INTERVIEWER	PRE-SERVICE 1	PRE-SERVICE 2
1	What teaching methods do you use when teaching English to elementary students?	"We must demonstrate directly because children can understand better when we provide direct examples."	"I use the lecture method, not just simple explanation but as an introduction to the material. Then I use the demonstration method, demonstrating what we want to convey to students, like parts of the body—showing where the nose is while teaching the English word."
2	What are the main difficulties experienced when teaching basic materials such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar?	"Students understand Indonesian better. They know a to z, but when we teach them the alphabet again, as Sir Martin said, they get confused."	"The difficulty is mostly from the transition from Kindergarten to primary school. Students don't fully recognize the alphabet—they can say a b c but cannot explain, write, or differentiate what abc is. There's difficulty in spelling, so we use spelling close to

			them, like calling their own nicknames and asking how to spell their names."
3	How do you prepare materials before teaching English in elementary school?	"We can also use origami paper which has various colors. We can show and give them because elementary students want to see concretely, directly, and realistically."	"We match the material to be taught, like colors. We can use their surroundings—they must first be introduced to basic colors like yellow, red, green, blue. We can use media they already know like balloons, colorful objects around them. The rooms should also be colorful."
4	What media and learning resources are used in English learning?	"Media can be taken from our surroundings, and we can also use YouTube—there are many alphabet songs. Students are more enthusiastic to learn with songs, audio, especially audio-visual."	"We use various media, not just electronic media but also pronunciation media, with correct pronunciation. We can send voice recordings with correct pronunciation too, and other learning media like picture books."
5	How do students respond to the English learning that you teach?	"Students' initial response is definitely confused because they're used to Indonesian. Suddenly we teach English—for example, the basic word 'cat.' When I ask students to read it, they read it as 'cet' because c-a-t becomes 'cet.' They're not used to it, so it's very confusing for students."	"Same as Miss Agus—children in the transition period definitely feel confused. But we can minimize this by using fun learning techniques where we learn while playing, like when learning colors, we can prepare colorful balloons and divide them into groups, but they must first recognize basic colors and their spelling."
6	What strategies do you use to overcome their limited English	"As Sir mentioned, our strategy is using fun learning, playing while learning. We can use colorful balls, place	"To prepare ourselves, teachers must also prepare. We must first study the learning

	abilities in the teaching and learning process?	several baskets and write 'red' in front of the basket. Then, 'children, please take the red ball,' and they will compete to find it while playing instruments and experiencing so they remember and their language and vocals improve."	material to be delivered, prepare ourselves mentally for how to face students, because not all students want to learn. There are different interests—we must first understand the character of those students."
7	How do you evaluate elementary students' English abilities during the learning process?	"I agree with Sir Martin. Now when we evaluate students, it must be in written form or tests, and we can also give homework. As Sir Martin said, we also need to test their spelling first, how they pronounce, and after they can do the alphabet, usually we move to numbers."	"When evaluating students' abilities, we test them with spelling first—spelling about the alphabet, about letters first, how they pronounce, then they can spell. We can't immediately ask them to read vocabulary or sentences because they definitely can't. We must first give them alphabet learning and spelling letters."
8	What form of difficulty is most often encountered by students when learning?	"The most difficult is managing the class, especially Grade 1 elementary students. They're transitioning from kindergarten to primary and still carry that nature—they can't sit still. When we're teaching, they keep calling 'Miss, Miss.' Managing the class is the most difficult because the students are extraordinary."	"Same as Miss said, but I'll add—for students transitioning from kindergarten to primary, they definitely can't read. That's quite difficult—reading is most important because the Indonesian curriculum requires students to be able to read first, then write. That's the most common difficulty we face."
9	To what extent does the use of Indonesian affect students' understanding of English material?	"It definitely has a huge impact! Because Indonesian and English pronunciation or articulation patterns are very different, Indonesian definitely influences English."	"Indonesian is not far different from English, but the difference is that English is a foreign language. The use of Indonesian is definitely more dominant in their

			daily lives. Asking them to learn to pronounce English will definitely be very difficult, and I think that's the difficulty."
10	What are your hopes regarding improving their competence in learning English in the future?	"As teachers, we definitely want our students to be able to speak at least two languages. As we know, nowadays in the working world, people almost must be able to speak English. Schools now have many English possibilities where pronunciation can be used daily, like Singapore's curriculum—their children can already speak English from a young age, following the trend. Singapore is top one in education where students from childhood can speak English. We know Singaporeans speak Mandarin, but students are serious about learning English."	"My hope is that we cannot use the source of English only from teachers. Teachers should be professional, and I hope schools provide professional English teachers if the school focuses on students learning English, but without eliminating their mother tongue, Indonesian."

DISCUSSION

This research presented significant insights into the strategies employed by pre-service teachers without formal English education backgrounds in addressing the challenges of instructing young learners in Indonesian elementary schools. The discussion analyzed findings from classroom observations and interviews to tackle the principal research question: How did pre-service teachers lacking specialized English education training conduct English instruction, and what teaching strategies developed from their classroom experiences?

Teacher-Student Interactions

Both teachers developed good relationships by saying hello and asking questions that got students involved. Miss Agus used formal greetings like "Hello. Good morning student" and checks on students' health to make English use more normal and lower students' anxiety (Boyd et al., 2020). Gunawan et al. (2021) say that Miss Nisa used scaffolded questioning to link new vocabulary with ideas that students already knew. But students had trouble switching from Indonesian to English, which was made worse by phonological interference (for example, "cat" was read as "cet").

Language Use: Code-Switching and Repetition

Teachers employed strategic code-switching between Indonesian (as the instructional medium) and English (as the target vocabulary), a valid pedagogical technique that utilized students' linguistic repertoires (García & Wei, 2014). They used three-stage repetition (teacher modelling, student repetition, and choral repetition) to help students learn new words (Nation, 2020–2024; Walsh, 2020). This strategy was not just memorization; it was a deliberate attempt to get around phonological problems.

Teaching Strategies

Teachers used ice-breaking activities like the "AraSamsam" song to get students excited and make them feel good about learning (Rusman, 2022; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). They used YouTube, songs, and kinesthetic learning (colorful balls and baskets) to teach in many different ways, which is in line with Total Physical Response (Asher, 1969) and multimodal literacy (Kress, 2003). This demonstrated that effective practices could be adopted from general pedagogical knowledge, even in the absence of specialized training.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how pre-service teachers without specialized English training taught English at SD Antasari Medan, highlighting both strengths and challenges. General pedagogical competence enabled teachers to deliver lessons effectively despite limited linguistic knowledge. They created supportive classrooms through greetings, questioning, and motivation, encouraging student participation. Code-switching helped bridge understanding and introduce new vocabulary, while repetition, modeling, and multimodal strategies such as songs, visuals, gestures, and online resources increased engagement. However, students struggled with alphabet recognition, spelling, writing, and pronunciation due to first-language interference. Assessments often emphasized memorization over communication, and classroom management remained challenging. Overall, while transferable teaching skills were beneficial, specialized training, better resources, and institutional support remain essential.

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