

Challenges in Learning English for EYL Students: Current Issues of Indonesian Private Islamic Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACTS

English is an imperative skill to understand because it has a dominant part in almost the current field in globalization contexts such as in media, technology, science, business, and education. This paper aims at investigating students' challenges in learning English. This study applied a basic qualitative research approach. The data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires were distributed to the different school students of private Islamic elementary schools, and the interviews were conducted with six private Islamic elementary school English teachers. Then, the data were analyzed qualitatively. The findings revealed that elementary school students, especially Private Islamic Elementary Schools Students in Malang Regency encountered some challenges in learning English, especially in pronunciation, vocabulary mastery, writing English words correctly (spelling), and memorizing English vocabulary. The findings suggested and recommended elementary school English teachers to highlight and underscore solving and minimalizing those challenges by easy and adaptable ways of teaching English.

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INTRODUCTION

Students in Indonesia should be introduced to English at an early age. It is proved by EF EPI (English Proficiency Index) that globally Indonesia placed 51st of 88 countries. In 2018, globally EF EPI (English Proficiency Index) ranks Indonesia as the 51st country. Indonesia's score of EF EPI is 51,58 which shows as low proficiency. In Asia, Indonesian English proficiency paced 13th of 21 countries. It is indicated that English proficiency is still low. Whereas, English is globally applied in many sectors. Hence, English should be taught as early as possible in order to provide young generation competing globally (Anggraini, 2018).

English is an imperative skill to understand and master because English has a dominant part in almost the current field in globalization contexts. Hence, English takes many important parts of global issues such as in media, technology, science, business, and education (Rao, 2019; Rahayu & Rosa 2021). Besides, to keep the global relationship in much fields such as in education, business, tourism, technology, English appears as the global language or international language where it is not only used by the business organization, scientist, tourism and business sectors. Therefore, English should be learned earlier (Sholeh & Anam, 2020). And acknowledging English since in earlier ages is crucial and necessary (Anggraini, 2018). Yet, Sepyanda, (2017) underscores the reasons of teaching for elementary school students. Firstly, English is used widely as global language covering many contexts of

life. Secondly, students of elementary schools are the appropriate phase to learn a language such as English (Stakanova & Tolstikhina ,2014; Lestari, 2003) explored the reasons why English should be taught in earlier age; [1] it can stimulate the students' language and their development, [2] it can attach the students to the other cultures, [3] it can create an excellent basic to master foreign language, [4] it can develop general educational abilities by mastering foreign language, [5] the longer the students learn a language, the more proficiency they will acquire the targeted language. In another hand, according to theory of critical period hypothesis biologically the children's brain in this age is easily to master any language the children's brain elasticity is so biologically high that it is very easy for them to master language posed to them (Rahayu & Rosa, 2021). And psychologically, elementary school students in age seven to eleven is a golden phase to learn and master language (Purnama, 2014). Cameron, (2001) underlines the advantages of learning English in earlier age such obtaining a few language skill areas; pronunciation and listening comprehensions. In another hand, Curtain (1993) clarifies that the students starting their language learning in earlier age such in primary schools have better opportunities in having higher language proficiency level than those starting their language learning in secondary schools.

In Indonesia, English is no longer listed as required subject for elementary school. In the latest curriculum (2013) English is not included whether as compulsory subject or local content subject. In this case, elementary schools are given decision whether English is taught or not. Out of this issue, a number of elementary schools provide English to teach (Habibi & Sofwan, 2015; Sakhi, 2022; Rahayu and Rosa, 2021). One of the elementary schools who provide English as a local content subject are Islamic private elementary schools at Malang regency, Pagelaran district. It is chosen because these Islamic private elementary schools English in which it is not a compulsory subject to teach. The policy of not including English as a required subject for elementary schools is considered illogically due to of two perspectives, practical and theoretical aspects. In a practical perspective, English is used and required in many sectors such as in education, technology and business so English should be taught and acknowledges since in earlier age (Rao, 2019; Rahayu & Rosa, 2021). And from theoretical perspective, a number of researches showed and underlined that learning English in earlier age is important (Rahayu & Rosa 2021). Yet, International empirical study noticed that students starting learning language generally have a higher proficiency level than those starting learning language at the later stage (Gawi, 2012). Hence, the best time to learn English is started in earlier age (Widodo and Dewi, 2019). Yet, both teachers and students in teaching and learning English encounter a number of challenges. Related to teachers' challenges in teaching English, Nunan, (2010) underlines five main challenges; [1] relating to cognitive development, [2] relating to having motivation, [3] relating to having attention, [4] relating to multi-level groups, and [5] relating to assessment for learning. In another hand, both teachers' challenges and students' challenges, many researchers locally or worldwide have already focused to investigate such as (Mejía, 2009; Copland, Garton, & Burns, 2014; Widodo & Dewi, 2019; Rahayu and Rosa, 2021; Marzulina et al., 2021).

A number of researches have been conducted related challenges in teaching and learning English both worldwide and Indonesian context. A study conducted in Colombia by Mejía, (2009) revealed that due to current policy the teachers of elementary schools suffered lack of sources to foster their expertise in teaching English because by the government took much attention to the higher school level and university graduates related to the English proficiency. And the study underlined and recommended to voices value of elementary school teachers in taking decision in order to develop their teaching mastery to the students. Additionally, Copland, Garton, & Burns, (2014) revealed the result of their research related to EYL teachers' main challenges in teaching English. This research was conducted with a

number of participants in five different primary school in different countries. A mix-method was applied and surveys were also compiled by 4,459 teachers worldwide to capture the data. To obtain the data, case studies approach by observation and interview with the teachers were also used. The results of the research related to challenges in teaching English were such as teachers' proficiency (teaching grammar, teaching speaking, teaching writing, differentiating learning), classroom management (teaching large classes, discipline and motivation) and government policy and status of the curricula. Unfortunately, some of the challenges are not underscored yet in young learner teaching literature to date. Besides, the other challenges locally are related to the upgrading the English teacher's competence. Hence, the research argued that teacher's education should take a serious on acknowledging teachers to general approaches to English language teaching and supporting teachers in meeting the challenges encountered.

While in Indonesian context, a research was conducted by Rahayu & Rosa, (2021) in some elementary schools in Jambi City. The research applied a qualitative research paradigm and descriptive technique was utilized. To obtain the data, questionnaires through google form shared to the students and interviews to the teachers in different schools were used. Then, the data were quantitatively analyzed. The research found a number of challenges encountered by the students such as lack of vocabulary mastery, difficulties in pronunciation, unexpected and unenjoyable learning atmosphere; and low motivation in learning English. Yet, the result of the research underlined and recommended to improve the technologically creative teachers and easily adaptive related to the students' challenges in learning English. Additionally, Widodo & Dewi, (2019) revealed a number problems encountered by the teachers related to teaching English for EFL students and the ways to overcome. In this research, qualitative approach was used and document analysis, observation and interview both teachers and students were utilized. The participant of this research was one native speaker, two homeroom teachers and 21 students of the second grade. The result of the research revealed some problems. They are [1] discipline lacks, [2] less of parents' support, [3] diversity of students' English capacity, [4] difficulties in habiting English. And the solutions are [1] utilizing application of Dojo, [2] hands on learning, [3] providing class preparation, and [4] supporting and assisting from the teachers and friends. And Marzulina et al., (2021) also investigated the challenges in teaching English for EFL. Qualitatively, the research applied a case study and two teachers were involved. The data were obtained through observation and interview with the teachers, then analyzed by thematic analysis. The findings explored five challenges encountered by the teachers such as lack of supported facility, management of limited time, management of crowded classes, and fostering students' language competences. Then, this research recommended teachers to reduce the challenges by a number of ways such acknowledging new vocabularies, engaging students to bring a dictionary, and giving motivation. While related to facility issue, language laboratory and available teachers and students' hand book should be provided. Also, time allocation should be noticed. And the last, government should provide more materials and add time allocation in teaching and learning English.

Both of overseas and Indonesian researches, generally the researchers noticed to teachers' challenges in teaching English for elementary students or higher-level students, and some of them investigated only the students' challenges in learning English both elementary students or higher-level students. And it is still noticed to investigate students' challenges for Private Islamic Elementary Schools providing English as a local content subject currently. Yet, this research was conducted at private Islamic Elementary Schools in Pagelaran Malang regency East- Java. However, theoretically, students encounter many challenges or problems

in learning English. Therefore, this recently research aims at investigating the challenges faced by students in Malang Regency Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

The current study constructs a qualitative research, and a basic qualitative was employed. Since to understand a specific theme of participants or a social event, qualitative approach is appropriate. Yet, there are some point clarifying qualitative research key points such as dealing with context or meaning, naturally setting, human instrument, data source multiple, participants meaning, emergent design, reflexivity, holistic, applying inductive and deductive analysis and descriptive data (Ary *et al.* 2010; Creswell, 2012; Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N.E., & Hyun, 2012)

Dealing with the characteristic of qualitative research, this current research is appropriate to apply since it is to understand and investigate social events or phenomenon. Yet, the researcher investigated challenges encountered by private Islamic elementary school students in Malang Regency. The subjects involved in this study were elementary school students and teachers from different schools. To select the participants, a convenient sampling technique was used. Bryman, (2015) stated that convenient sampling is the simply available to the researcher. In this technique, there is no certain criteria to be a subject of a research. In this rule, the researcher involves the teachers and students willing to be the subjects to get their opinions and viewpoints.

In a qualitative research, a number of collecting data techniques can be utilized such as conducting observation, conducting interview, distributing questionnaire, analyzing documents, and searching audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2012). In a qualitative research, the data collection techniques will be stopped if the researcher finds the saturation points indicated with similar data or same emerging themes (Kumar, 2011; Bryman, 2015; Carlsson & Glenton, 2014). To gain the data, a questionnaire (written open-ended questions) distributed to students from different schools and interview (open-ended) with the teachers from different schools were applied. The questionnaire was the primary data collection technique and the interview was the secondary technique in collecting data related to students' challenges in learning English. Dealing with the procedure of collecting data, an iterative paradigm was done. It is used to check and recheck data and connect them with emerging themes (Srivastava 2009). This paradigm means that questionnaire was done firstly, then verified and clarified by the result of interview with the teachers to ensure that the data were accurate.

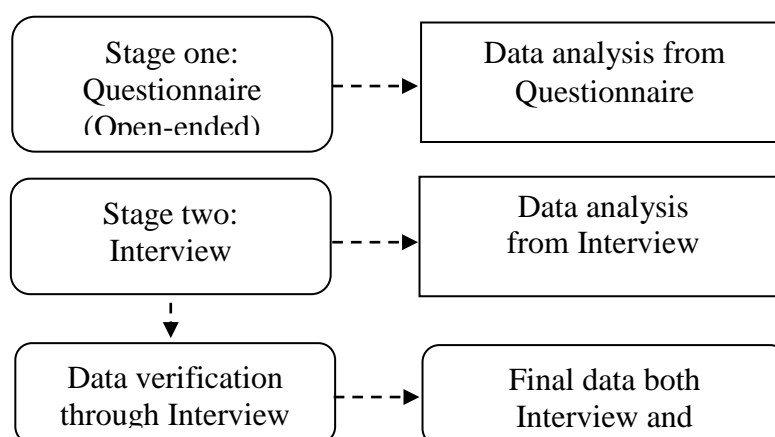


Figure 1. Stage of data collection procedure

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

In this recent research, some procedures of data analysis were constructed such as familiarizing and organizing, coding and reducing, and interpreting and representing (Ary et al. 2010). And to ensure the accurate data, construct quality standard in qualitative research and avoid subjectivity of feeling, motives and perceptions, trustworthiness was done (Guba & Lincoln (1989) quoted in Bryman, 2012). To apply the trustworthiness, credibility, confirmability, and transferrability were constructed. Related to credibility, questionnaire and interview were done. While the confirmability was done by recording the interview activity and the answers of questionnaire from the participants. And transferrability was done by different data collection techniques with distributing questionnaire and interview activity.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Although English is not anymore taken as a serious attention from the government in which it is not provided in curriculum as a compulsory or local content subject, a number of elementary schools still provide English at the schools to give a schemata knowledge or to acknowledge English from earlier. Yet, as the result of investigation at Islamic private elementary school students located at Pagelaran-Malang regency, it is found that the teachers encountered some challenges. The challenges in teaching English for Islamic private elementary school students are varied. The findings are exposed as follow.

Students' challenges in learning English

The results of data analysis reveal that there are four crucial challenges encountered by the students such as difficulties in pronunciation, lack of vocabulary mastery, difficulty in writing the English words correctly (poor spelling), and difficulty in memorizing English vocabularies. The first challenge is difficulty in pronunciation. The result of questionnaire related to difficulty in pronunciation can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Challenge of difficulty in pronunciation

| Sebutkan kendala saudara dalam belajar bahasa Inggris! | | |
|--|----------|--|
| | S-1/TQ | Sulit untuk membacanya (<i>difficulty in pronunciation</i>) |
| | S-2/GR | Sulit untuk membaca (<i>difficulty in pronunciation</i>) |
| BS | S-3/AZ | Tidak cara bacanya (<i>difficulty in pronunciation</i>) |
| | S-4/H | Sulit untuk membaca (<i>difficulty in pronunciation</i>) |
| | S-5/Y | Sulit untuk membaca (<i>difficulty in pronunciation</i>) |
| | S-6/NIM | Tidak tahu cara bacanya (<i>difficulty in pronunciation</i>) |
| | S-1/H | Bacaan tidak sama dengan tulisannya (<i>difficulty in pronunciation</i>) |
| | S-2/NIM | Tidak paham bacaannya (<i>difficulty in pronunciation</i>) |
| MU | S-3/Y | Susah cara bacanya (<i>difficulty in pronunciation</i>) |
| | S-4/ETPS | Sulit cara bacanya (<i>difficulty in pronunciation</i>) |
| | S-5/LD | Cara membaca (<i>difficulty in pronunciation</i>) |
| | S-6/M.F | Sulit bacanya (<i>difficulty in pronunciation</i>) |

The open-ended questionnaire distributed to the students show that pronunciation difficulty is encountered by them. It is a natural site since the sounds of English are not pronounced as the spelling in which it is different from Indonesia words. Besides, this challenge is also completed with the absence of a number of the English sounds such as in their mother tongue, bahasa Indonesia such /ʃ/, /dʒ/, /θ/, /ð/, and the others (Juswandi, Saiful 2022). The results of this current study is dealing with some previous studies related to the challenges of leaning English encountered by elementary students that pronunciation is

dominantly faced either English as a second or foreign language (Tejeda & Santos, 2014; Juswandi, Saiful, & Mahmudah, 2022).

In learning English, pronunciation brings and gives some affects such as it determines the students' English ability especially speaking or oral and listening skills. And this also affects the students' understanding with the English words sound how they are pronounced or sounded. Consequently, it affects to their speaking ability. Therefore, poor pronunciation causes and hinders students unable to express their idea, feeling, thought and communicate with English properly and clearly. Yet, having a good and proper pronunciation makes students' English ability better and increase their confidence in expressing their English oral ability (Tejeda and Santos, 2014). The results of the questionnaire show that the students are poor in pronunciation. The main problem is because English words are not the same with their mother tongue pronunciation in which they are pronounced and sounded as the words. This challenge affects their English understanding over all such as they cannot express idea, feeling, though in English although they know the English, but because of their poor of pronunciation they cannot do it. Also, the students cannot read English word or text because of their poor of English pronunciation. In addition, the result of interview with the teachers related to students' challenges in learning English reveal that the main and core students' challenges is pronunciation. They clarify with deeper and broader description that pronunciation is the basic knowledge because sometimes the students understand and know the meaning of English words when they are written, but they do not understand and know the meaning when they are pronounced or instructed with the English words. So, it can be inferred that poor pronunciation becomes the main hinder and factor related to their challenge in learning English.

The second challenge encountered by the private Islamic students in Malang regency is lack of vocabulary mastery. The results of distributed questionnaire show that vocabulary is a crucial challenge faced by them. This can be seen in figure 2 below.

Sebutkan kendala saudara dalam belajar bahasa Inggris!

| | | |
|----|---------|--|
| | S-1/H | Tidak tau artinya (<i>lack of vocabulary mastery</i>) |
| BS | S-2/B | Artinya tidak tahu dan sulit (<i>lack of vocabulary mastery</i>) |
| | S-3/FM | Tidak tau artinya (<i>lack of vocabulary mastery</i>) |
| | S-4/NIM | Tidak tau artinya (<i>lack of vocabulary mastery</i>) |
| | S-1/MT | Gag tau artinya (<i>lack of vocabulary mastery</i>) |
| MU | S-2/A | Artinya sulit (<i>lack of vocabulary mastery</i>) |
| | S-3/Y | Tidak bisa mengartikan (<i>lack of vocabulary mastery</i>) |
| | S-4/LD | Mengartikan (<i>lack of vocabulary mastery</i>) |

Figure 2 Challenge of vocabulary mastery lack

The results of this study are in line with the previous studies done by Martha Suri (2012); Sintadewi, Artini, & Febryan (2020); Rahayu & Rosa (2021). They revealed that lack of vocabulary mastery is one of the challenges faced by elementary students. In this case, the lack of vocabulary is noticed as a serious challenge that should be undertaken seriously in learning English moreover for elementary students. Hence, vocabulary mastery should be noticed with the closer attention because it affects the four students' English skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Martha Suri, 2012; Supriatin & Rizkilillah, 2018; Sintadewi, Artini, & Febryan, 2020; Rahayu & Rosa, 2021). In line with this case, the previous study has already emphasized and noticed the urgent efforts in developing and increasing the students' vocabulary mastery because it is the main basic knowledge in learning English (Hyso and Tabaku 2011). Besides, without proper and sufficient vocabulary mastery, the students cannot employ their idea, feeling, and thought (Aba 2019). The results of questionnaires are

strengthened by the results of interview conducted to the teachers. They informed that all their students in elementary schools encountered a serious challenges related to vocabulary mastery in which it hinders the English teaching and learning. Furthermore, the teachers stated that this serious challenge should be undertaken and noticed in developing the students' vocabulary mastery.

The third challenge encountered by the private Islamic elementary school students in Malang regency is difficulty writing the English words (poor spelling). Spelling is noticed as imperative and crucial parts in English language skills such as reading and writing skill. A number of researchers stated that spelling can help students in reading and writing properly and appropriately. And this way brings much useful especially for English young learners. Yet, spelling challenges are also underlined as a major challenges for elementary students in learning English (Sarwat et al. 2021).

The results of questionnaires can be seen in figure 3 as follow.

| | | |
|--|--------|--|
| Sebutkan kendala saudara dalam belajar bahasa Inggris! | | |
| | S-1/AU | Tulisannya (<i>Spelling or writing the english words correctly</i>) |
| BS | S-2/SH | Sulit nulisnya (<i>Spelling or writing the english words correctly</i>) |
| | S-3/B | Membaca dan penulisannya (<i>Spelling or writing the english words correctly</i>) |
| MU | S-1/MF | Tulisannya sulit (<i>Spelling or writing the english words correctly</i>) |
| | S-2/T | Menulisnya (<i>Spelling or writing the english words</i>) |
| | S-3/ | Nulisnya dan tidak bisa ABC nya (<i>Spelling or writing the english words correctly</i>) |

Figure 3 Challenge of poor spelling (writing the English words correctly)

The results of questionnaires reveal that the elementary students encountered a serious challenge in spelling or writing the English words correctly. This case should be noticed and considered as crucial challenge because poor spelling is one the important components in language skill. In other hand, any mistake in spelling may change the meaning of the words and deliver different understanding of the content discussion. Hence, English students should acknowledge spelling correctly to avoid any miscommunication or misunderstanding which is completed by the poor spelling. Nevertheless, proper and accurate spelling is a must to employ the exact meaning and understanding (Altamimi & Ab Rashid 2019). Furthermore, they highlighted that spelling plays very essential role and it is required by students in learning English. The results of the questionnaire are verified with results of interview with the teachers. They said that the students of elementary schools have encountered a number of challenges. One of them is poor spelling or they face challenge in writing the English words correctly. It is caused the English words are different with their mother tongue, Bahasa Indonesia in which they are written as they are sounded.

The last challenge encountered by the private Islamic elementary schools in Malang regency is difficulty in memorizing English vocabulary. The results of questionnaire can be seen in figure 4 below.

| | | |
|--|----------|---|
| Sebutkan kendala saudara dalam belajar bahasa Inggris! | | |
| | S-1/FA | Menghafal kosa kata bahasa Inggris (<i>difficulty in memorizing English vocabulary</i>) |
| MU | S-2/LD | Menghafal (<i>difficulty in memorizing English vocabulary</i>) |
| | S-3/ETPS | Susah mengahfal kosa kata (<i>difficulty in memorizing English vocabulary</i>) |

Figure 4 Challenge of difficulty in memorizing English vocabulary

This challenge is included as a main problem encountered by the students. This is shown by the results of questionnaire that from a number of participants, only three students faced a challenge related to difficulty in memorizing English vocabulary. These results of questionnaire are also strengthened by the results of interview with English teachers. They explained in detail that the students of elementary schools also have difficulty in memorizing the meaning of the vocabularies. So, the solutions they did are drilling and repetition strategies. The vocabularies taught in the certain meeting are repeated in the next meeting. It is done to make the students remembering the vocabularies have been memorized. Because the students are difficult in memorizing or remembering the vocabularies. This challenge is also found by Mailasari, (2018). She revealed some challenges encountered by the elementary school students, namely incorrect pronunciation, wrong writing, and forgetting to remember the meaning of the English words.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In this current research, a number of challenges in learning English were encountered by the Private Islamic Elementary School Students in Malang Regency either informed by the students from different schools through distribution of questionnaire or information from the English teachers in different schools through interview. Particularly, in learning English, the students faced four main challenges; pronunciation difficulty challenge, lack of vocabulary challenge, difficulty in writing the English words correctly challenge (poor spelling), and difficulty in memorizing English vocabularies challenge in which they should be noticed and considered as the serious problems or challenges in learning English. Hence, the English teachers of elementary schools hopefully highlight and underscore to solve and minimalize those challenges.

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