

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter will discuss a general overview of theories related to Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL), as well as reviewing previous research regarding challenges and solutions in teaching English in elementary schools. By reviewing relevant literature, one can build a strong research framework to analyze the challenges faced by non-English primary teachers in primary schools in Indonesia and the solutions they implement in their teaching practices.

#### **A. Theoretical Framework**

This part reviews the literature that forms the basis of the present study. It includes some underlying theories and previous research, which are detailed below.

##### **1. Teaching English to Young Learners**

This point presents a literature review about Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL), which is the basis of this research, and will discuss theoretical concepts related to young learners and their language-learning processes. Several important aspects will be studied, including the definition and characteristics of young students, the way they learn in general, and the way they acquire English as a foreign language. Apart from that, this discussion will also outline the principles and stages of TEYL and provide a general overview of TEYL in the Indonesian context.

##### **a. Definitions of Young Learners**

Young learners are children who are in the early stages of development. Children aged 5 to 12 years are known as young learners because they undergo rapid development and growth and require a special teaching approach (Shin & Crandall, 2014; T. Linse, 2005). Cameron (2001, p. 13) states that young learners will acquire language differently depending on their stage of development. A customized approach to learning refers to designing strategies or teaching methods that suit students' developmental needs and unique characteristics. According to Harmer (in Sehan, 2018),

people of different ages have different needs, abilities, and cognitive capacities. For instance, we might anticipate that elementary school-aged children will learn a lot of foreign languages through play, while adults will benefit more from abstract thought.

Young learners are in a stage of rapid development, thus requiring a special teaching approach appropriate to their stage of development. Methods such as learning while playing are more effective for young children because they make children feel comfortable and allow them to have fun while learning.

#### b. Characteristics of Young Learners

Understanding young learners' characteristics is very important for designing effective teaching approaches. Teachers can successfully engage pupils and support their growth by having a thorough awareness of the characteristics and requirements of young learners. (Pratama & Gandana, 2024; Sulkifli, 2021). According to Shin and Crandall (2014) Young learners have unique characteristics that influence the way they learn. Among them are the following:

##### 1. Energetic and physically active

Children's innate energy and physical activity impact their learning and classroom participation. Teachers must realize that young learners cannot be silent or sit for the same amount of time. So, primary school teachers must consider how to harness their students' energetic enthusiasm and direct it toward productive learning (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Teachers can channel this character through kinesthetic learning strategies such as Total Physical Response (TPR). TPR involves students in active classroom activities when teaching and studying English (Rambe, 2020; Zur & Selfieni, 2022). Choosing learning methods that encourage students to be active and channel their energy toward achieving learning goals.

## 2. Spontaneous and not afraid to speak out or participate

Their desire to be involved in learning makes them learners who are not easily hesitant to participate actively and are not afraid of being wrong in expressing their opinions. Young children are more prone to participate in activities and communicate in English without experiencing feelings of self-consciousness (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Given these characteristics, they make good language imitators. Young students accept what we say and how we say it, just like sponges do (Munafiah & Novianti, 2023). They do not mind repeating what the teacher says or singing entertaining songs, even if they do not understand every word or use the language correctly (Shin & Crandall, 2014). A fun approach and positive reinforcement will empower young children with the potential to acquire language quickly, aligning with their unique characteristics.

## 3. Curious and receptive to new ideas

According to Shin and Crandall (2014) Young learners are naturally curious. Young children exhibit intense curiosity during the early years, ask many questions, and try to understand everything around them. (Koç, 2023; Yates, 2024). Teachers can use this innate curiosity to create meaningful and captivating learning activities that meet the developmental needs of young students. The Mystery Bag game, for instance, is a typical game at gatherings or in English classes (Shin & Crandall, 2014). With these activities, teachers can take advantage of students' natural curiosity to foster interest in learning and create a supportive environment for students' cognitive development.

## 4. Imaginative and enjoys making-believe

Young students use imaginative play and enjoy make-believe to explore new ideas and concepts in fun and enjoyable ways. Young learners enjoy engaging in imaginative activities the most (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Young children's imagination, which is frequently

evident as a natural skill, enables them to explore the world creatively (Meeramani et al., 2024). According to Shin and Crandall (2014) Young learners can participate in role-playing and drama activities to immerse themselves in "pretend" scenarios and portray different characters or objects. Playing Guess the Animal is one example. The student who gives the movement will pretend to be an animal that the other students must guess. They can use this game to learn new vocabulary. In order to help pupils understand a new language, teachers might also employ plays or stories to build an imaginative world (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Young children's capacity to enjoy pretend play is improved when children's literature supports their imaginative involvement (Torres, 2019). With games of guessing movements and drama, students can be creative and enjoy doing it. Thus making the learning enjoyable and meaningful.

#### 5. Easily distracted and have short attention spans

Young learners often have limited attention spans and can be easily sidetracked. Young students are characterized by their abundance of movement, short attention spans, inability to remain motionless, and mood swings (Recard & Nathania, 2021). This shows that dynamic and interesting activities are needed to maintain children's attention throughout the learning session. Despite their short attention span, children may focus on longer tasks if they find them interesting and enjoyable (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Lessons should also be organized as a sequence of short activities. For example, to keep a ten-year-old student focused and on task, a teacher might divide a story-writing exercise that could take more than fifteen minutes into manageable sections and assess the student's progress at the end of each section (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Shin and Crandall (2014) also added that after students really focus on a task, teachers can assign them to take a break. Young learners are easily distracted and have short attention spans, making it the teacher's role to create a dynamic, interesting learning

environment and design lessons that keep children focused and motivated.

#### 6. Egocentric and relate new ideas to themselves

Young children naturally focus on themselves. They frequently relate new concepts to themselves and see the world through the lenses of their personal experiences. A child's character is characterized by an egocentric mindset that is self-centered and incapable of accepting viewpoints that differ from their own ((Mutiah et al., 2020; Shin & Crandall, 2014). This characteristic is crucial to their learning process since they are more likely to interact with and accept important ideas.

For example, when teachers give orders to children to compose an acrostic name poem about themselves, they will feel happy. They find it engaging because it relates to their experiences and allows them to work on new vocabulary in a way that connects to their lives (Shin & Crandall, 2014). This fact clarifies why children should be involved in all activities (Anam, 2022). To foster young learners' understanding and active participation, teachers can exploit the egocentric characteristics of young learners by involving them in tasks that align with their identities.

#### 7. Social and learning to relate to others

Developing social skills and learning to relate to others is important to a child's growth. In Vygotsky's opinion, all learning takes place through social interactions with other people (as cited in Pinter, 2006). Children learn through play and exploration, and through opportunities to discuss things with other people, primarily adults (Pinter, 2006). Students can interact with each other in various ways, including one-on-one, group, and teacher-student interactions, which require the teacher's role to balance learning activities (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Several activities can be done to create social interaction, such as encouraging children to work together, share ideas, exchange opinions through group assignments, provide feedback to each other, and participate in

discussion activities in class. To support these activities, teachers must create an environment that provides security and makes children feel valued when providing opinions.

Grasping all of these traits will make teaching engaging and motivating for young learners (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Teachers must understand the unique characteristics of young learners to design effective teaching approaches. Children are energetic, spontaneous, curious, imaginative, have a short attention span, and are social. Teachers can create interesting learning and support their development by understanding these characteristics.

#### c. How Young Learners Learn

Young learners learn languages effectively through direct interaction with their environment. Piaget (1896-1980) suggested that Children in developmental stages actively make sense of their environment to build their knowledge (As cited in Pinter, 2006; Shin & Crandall, 2014). Piaget's Preoperational and Concrete Operational Stages are appropriate for elementary school students. Highly imaginative and egotistical in the Preoperational Stage. In contrast, as they enter the concrete operational stage, they may think more clearly because they are rooted in real things (As cited in Shin & Crandall, 2014).

According to Piaget, as cited in Pinter (2006), two processes occur at these two stages of development: the assimilation and accommodation processes. In the preoperational stage, an assimilation process often occurs. An example is when a child finds out that chickens and ducks lay eggs and then sees cats at the zoo. The child will also assume that cats lay eggs. At the concrete operational stage, in a conversation about animals, the parents said that the cat did not lay eggs. This is where the accommodation process occurs, where the child must adapt or change their thinking to accommodate this new idea.

It is also vital to recognize how children acquire knowledge through

social interactions. Vygotsky highlighted that children gain more insights from others, particularly through interactions with adults or peers with more experience (as cited in Shin & Crandall, 2014). In the classroom, Children need teacher assistance and scaffolding to carry out social interactions. When someone is learning something they cannot yet accomplish on their own, scaffolding is temporary assistance provided to them (Fajrin et al., 2024). Through these interactions, children gradually internalize new knowledge and skills.

Children acquire language skills efficiently by engaging directly with their surroundings and through scaffolding support from teachers, parents, and others around them. This approach involves using real objects and social interaction with more knowledgeable people. With guidance, examples, and gradual explanation (scaffolding), children can understand concepts easily and build confidence in using language independently.

#### d. How Young Learners Learn English as a Foreign Language

Learning English as a foreign language is carried out by examining how they understand their first language. According to Shin and Crandall's (2014) The young learners' first language environment is similar to the real world, so the language used will be contextual and authentic, thereby increasing their motivation to learn the language and use it in everyday life. So, the environment is crucial in learning English as a foreign language. Learners have opportunities to practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing. In authentic settings in an environment that is rich in the English language and culture (Irsani et al., 2023). Therefore, a meaningful learning environment and ample exposure to English play a crucial role in boosting motivation and naturally enhancing students' abilities.

Once that environment is established, meaningful practice is essential to developing their English language skills. In class, teachers need to involve students in group speaking activities to practice actively using English and interacting with classmates (Irsani et al., 2023). It is crucial to provide

students with several opportunities to practice using English in class to make language input in the classroom easier to understand (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Grammar learning is learned directly through repeated practice. Children do not learn language through explicit grammar; they will understand grammar implicitly through repetition (Prasetyaningrum et al., 2023; Shin & Crandall, 2014). Students' repeated and meaningful language engagement is key to natural and effective language acquisition.

Foreign language learning for young students requires a safe and positive learning environment so that children can learn naturally and without fear. Support from teachers who are patient and kind and understand students' differences in abilities will help children feel confident using the language they are learning, so teachers must pay attention to this.

#### e. Principles of TEYL

According to Shin et al., (2021) Six principles of English teaching and suggested classroom activities for younger students are included. These principles aim to build a strong foundation for teaching English at the pre- and primary school levels.

##### 1. Know young learners

Teachers collect data about each student's background, especially that relevant to their language development. In order to promote creativity and successfully handle the language development of English language learners (ELLs) in the classroom (Simanjuntak, 2023). This includes the learners' native tongues and cultures, their English language proficiency levels, and all the elements that may help or obstruct their further language growth.

##### 2. Create conditions for language teaching

Teachers create classroom environments that inspire learners to study, practice, and experiment with language. A classroom atmosphere that fosters motivation, where students feel comfortable and receive



complete backing from their teachers and fellow classmates, is crucial for effective language learning (Ali et al., 2020). Teachers use the best means to ensure that all the necessary conditions for learning a second language are met. Among them, teachers can create a friendly and safe learning environment, encourage students to be involved in learning, and organise various aspects of the learning process, such as adjusting teaching materials and interactions between students and teachers.

### 3. Design high-quality lessons for language development

Teachers know what pupils can accomplish at their current age and language development level and what they still need to learn. Afterwards, teachers establish the lesson's goals, organise the material's delivery, foster lively class discussions, and carry out relevant assignments supporting real-world language practice. According to Pebriantini and Vianty, (2024) Teachers create engaging, goal-oriented sessions that foster the growth of critical thinking, learning strategies, and foreign language competency.

### 4. Adapt lesson delivery as needed

Teachers differentiate education, scaffold activities based on students' English language skill levels, monitor their understanding, and modify their speech or materials. By using flexible teaching techniques and attending to each student's unique learning needs, teachers adapt their class delivery for EFL students (Syarifuddin et al., 2023). To put it briefly, a thorough grasp of learning a second language and the ability to make decisions during the lesson delivery based on student answers and actions are necessary for teaching English to young learners effectively.

### 5. Monitor and assess student language development

In order to evaluate student progress and provide developmentally appropriate feedback, teachers employ a range of classroom-based,

formative assessment methods, monitor student progress, and provide strategic feedback. By offering constructive feedback, pointing out areas of weakness, and encouraging ongoing development, formative evaluation plays a significant role in student achievement (Bhandari & Kshetree, 2024). Thus, formative evaluation not only helps teachers identify the learning needs of individual students but also creates a learning environment that is more responsive and supports the development of their language skills.

#### 6. Engage and collaborate within a community of practice

Teachers know that when they collaborate, they can provide better instruction to English language learners. Collaborative teaching enhances instructional initiatives, allowing teachers to act as mentors and facilitators (Vidyarthi, 2024). Teachers who work with young English language learners must be a part of their school's and the larger education community's communities of practice to have access to continual professional development.

#### f. Stages of TEYL

A structured approach is necessary in teaching English to young learners, as they possess unique and distinct characteristics. Using stages in learning will help in preparing a learning framework that has goals to be achieved. These stages include:

1. Warm-up activities: This stage includes activities to review previously studied material, provide information on the learning objectives, and prepare students to be ready to learn and focus on listening to the teacher. According to (Shin & Crandall, 2014), any unit or lesson should start with activities that increase student involvement, establish the objectives of the unit or lesson, and connect the current session to earlier lessons. During the first fifteen minutes of class, teachers carry out institutional chores and build an emotional and

cognitive framework through a range of activities, including greetings, light chat, announcements, attendance checks, course evaluations, and previews (Miloudi, 2024). This stage is crucial for creating a conducive learning environment and fostering student engagement from the outset.

2. Presentation activities: This stage is important in conveying material clearly and systematically to students. Through teacher instructions or textbooks, students are given language input for their basic language knowledge, especially language input that is appropriate for the learning to be carried out (Benzerroug, 2021). The activities carried out include providing vocabulary that is relevant to learning, listening, and imitating speech, and providing lots of repeated input to students (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Young learners need rich input with repeated exposure to vocabulary and structures in meaningful contexts (Cameron, 2001). Providing input at the beginning, such as introducing vocabulary and explaining language structures, helps students in speaking and writing activities during the practice stage.

3. Practice activities: Students need to practice giving the right responses and using meaningful language. This practice can be done through teacher support by providing guided exercises such as post-listening and post-reading activities with speaking and writing exercises (Shin & Crandall, 2014). In this practice, students act as the ones who complete the tasks given to them, while the teacher acts as the presenter. As students work on the tasks, the teacher supervises them, becomes a source of questions, and helps them when they cannot complete the tasks themselves (Benzerroug, 2021). Students can practically apply the information they gain through guided practice, and the teacher's role as a facilitator ensures that any obstacles can be overcome immediately, resulting in a more efficient and meaningful learning process.

4. In application activities: Students are assigned to be more independent in applying the language and content they have learned in meaningful contexts, such as those relevant to their daily lives (Alice,

2023). The purpose of this application stage is to encourage students to use language as it is used in real life (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Teachers can also create assignment groups to create projects related to the material being taught. It can be in the form of making sentences, making short stories, making posters related to the material, role-playing, and so on. Students do it, and the teacher is only an observer and moderator.

5. Assessment activities can be carried out in an integrated manner with the learning process, especially during joint practice or training. So, it does not have to be done at the end of learning. Teachers can observe students' abilities through their activities, such as answering questions, role-playing, discussing, etc. (Alice, 2023). According to Shin and Crandall (2014), the main focus at this stage is to provide corrections to mistakes made during learning carefully, so as not to make students feel afraid or embarrassed. Students will feel comfortable and enthusiastic about learning when teachers carry out assessments in a fun way and do not suppress students' feelings.

An effective learning process can be created through the implementation of structured learning stages. Stages such as warm-up, presentation, practice, application, and assessment can be a reference for creating such learning. These stages have an important role, such as to build learning readiness, provide explanations or understanding, train language skills, learn to apply skills in real life, and help teachers understand the development of students' language skills.

#### g. TEYL in Indonesian Context

One of Indonesia's English language education policies is to make English an optional subject in the Merdeka curriculum. English is included as one of the elective courses that can be taught to pupils in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (independent curriculum), which was implemented in late 2022. such as schools that have the necessary resources and sufficient infrastructure and facilities (Falah et al., 2023). However, there are English

teachers in some elementary schools who are responsible for teaching this topic, who are not always certified English teachers (Wahyuningsih, 2022). So, the quality and intensity of English learning depend on each school's policies.

For elementary school teachers, there is no Indonesian teacher education program that specifically trains English language teachers at the primary school level. Most English language instructors in Indonesian primary schools are secondary-trained EFL teachers without specialized training to teach English to primary school students (Faridah, 2021). Studies indicate that elementary school English teachers in Indonesia lack a degree in English. Elementary school teachers in Bali who do not have an English education background (Utami, 2022). The quality of the learning process can be affected by the gap between the learning needs of elementary schools and the qualifications of the teachers who teach them.

The learning motivation of young learners, especially in elementary school, when learning English, can be different; students may be less motivated because English is not a mandatory part of the curriculum and is rarely used in everyday life. It is more common for English to be taught as a foreign language in Indonesia, which indicates that rather than during everyday communication, English is mostly learned and taught in classrooms (Nakul & Murtafi'ah, 2024). This can lead to low student motivation due to the lack of direct connection between the material and the students' real-world environment.

## **2. Challenges and Possible Solutions in Teaching English in Elementary School**

Challenges arise when teaching English in elementary schools, so they require an approach and support from the teacher. One of the factors is that children are easily distracted and need interesting and interactive learning activities to stay motivated. As Shin and Crandall (2014) said, young learners are often prone to distractions due to their short attention spans. He added that

despite their short attention spans, students may focus on longer tasks if they find them engaging and enjoyable.

In addition, teachers who provide individual attention will feel hampered if their class size is too large or there are too many students. It can be difficult for teachers to provide individualized attention and create engaging learning environments in large classes, especially for pupils placed in the back (Orafi & Idris, 2023). Another challenge that is no less important is the lack of exposure to English outside the school environment. The minimal use of English outside of school can also be a challenging factor for English teachers teaching English at school. Students' favorable family surroundings contribute to their higher proficiency in a foreign language (Getie, 2020). Therefore, real obstacles to creating effective English learning in elementary schools can arise due to limited supporting environments and large student populations.

Several solutions for dealing with teaching challenges can be applied to overcome them. The challenges listed above include teachers making learning interesting and interactive. Here, the teacher's role is very important. The teacher must create an enjoyable class atmosphere. Teachers should involve students in enjoyable tasks that stimulate their curiosity and creativity. (Shin & Crandall, 2014). By engaging and inspiring pupils, game-based learning tools enhance the appeal of the educational process (Patra et al., 2022). Teachers can also divide students into small groups and provide collaborative learning tasks. Teachers must provide children with engaging themes, assign pair and group projects, and introduce early childhood literature to increase young learners' enthusiasm for learning English (Nabilah et al., 2022). Fun, participatory, and collaborative strategies can be a natural solution to overcome teaching challenges and increase student motivation and participation in the classroom.

## **B. Studies of Relevant Research**

Research related to teaching English to young learners in elementary school students with a focus on challenges, methods, and effective approaches has been discussed in several related titles. One of the studies conducted by Utami (2022)

Focuses on the challenges faced by elementary school English teachers in Bali with a non-English educational background. Bali is a popular international tourist destination, so mastering the English language is essential from the outset. This study reveals that they still encounter obstacles, despite understanding the fundamental principles of English language teaching. These various obstacles include teachers having difficulty using English fully in the classroom, limited ability to create interesting learning media, and managing student-centered learning activities.

According to research from Ibrahim et al. (2024), the main factors that challenge teachers include changes in the curriculum, which affect students' English proficiency levels and the teacher's ability to implement learning plans. The age gap of students in class influences learning development. Other research also discusses the challenges faced by English teachers in elementary schools. Namely, research from Kusumah (2023) focuses on internal and external challenges. Internal challenges include a lack of student motivation and mastery. Meanwhile, external challenges include limited time allocation for teaching, limited school facilities, and limited opportunities to participate in professional development programs.

Even though Utami's (2022) research was conducted in Bali, this research will contribute by looking at the same phenomenon in a different location context, namely in Tasikmalaya, which has different conditions. Where English teachers in Bali may be more accustomed to using English due to a supportive environment, such as the presence of tourists who return, which requires Balinese people to be able to communicate in English. Due to Bali's popularity as a travel destination, there is a strong need for its citizens to speak English fluently (Utami, 2022). Meanwhile, in Tasikmalaya, the challenges can be greater for teachers who do not have an English language background, because one of the environmental factors that are still limited in applying English in everyday life. Apart from identifying challenges, this research aims to identify strategies or solutions used to overcome existing challenges. This research is also expected to add new insight into teaching English in a different context than other research.