

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains what inspired the study and is divided into five parts. The first part discusses the background, outlining the issue and why the researcher chose this topic. The second part focuses on defining the research question for chapter four of the thesis. Next, operational definitions are provided to clarify key terms used throughout the thesis. The fourth part discusses the research aim, detailing what the study hopes to achieve. Finally, the significance of the study is explored, highlighting its practical implications and real-world relevance.

A. Background of the Study

Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) has emerged as a crucial aspect of education in several non-English-speaking countries, such as Indonesia. Since early education, English has been important to Indonesian students to meet their demands for a prosperous life (Surayatika, 2022). Learning English will significantly impact students' lives, particularly in the era of globalization, where proficiency in the language is essential for utilizing technology, making English usage inevitable (Isadaud et al., 2022). As a result, English has been taught at a basic level in Indonesia in keeping with the globalization trend that expects proficiency in the language from people from all over the world (Irianto, 2022; Surayatika, 2022). Therefore, introducing English at elementary school level is an appropriate and relevant step in supporting students' understanding of English at an early age.

In Indonesia, English education at the primary school level faces significant challenges, particularly for teachers who do not have a formal background in English language studies. In the case of a real phenomenon that emerged in an elementary school in Tasikmalaya, an English teacher who was not a graduate of English education had to teach English because of the limited number of English teachers at the school. Based on the results of the pre-observation, this teacher revealed that she could only teach English to the best of her ability. Through textual teaching (textbooks), this teacher taught English in grades three to six. She also

revealed that English lessons were difficult because the writing and pronunciation were different. This made the teacher struggle to pronounce English when teaching. In the early childhood education sector, many teachers do not have official English education backgrounds (Rao, 2019; Utami, 2022). Despite their limited English ability and absence of pedagogical experience, they are employed as English teachers (Madayani & Adibah, 2020). Without having a graduate background in English, teachers are not trained to pronounce and express words in English formally through university courses (Romadhon et al., 2024). The background of English language graduates will also impact teachers' confidence when teaching English. Teachers who possess higher self-confidence often have educational backgrounds that align with the subjects they teach (Indriani, 2021).

Effective instruction in the context of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) depends on understanding and applying fundamental principles. Teachers of young learners need to explore the basic principles of young learners' characteristics, how young learners learn, and how they learn the language to determine the best method for teaching English to young learners (Shin & Crandall, 2014). According to Pinter (2006) highlights the unique characteristics of early learners by emphasizing the phases of their cognitive and emotional development. Knowing these phases enables teachers to adapt their pedagogical approaches to be both successful and age-appropriate. Cameron emphasized that the teacher must focus on student learning by providing the right balance between challenge and support, tasks and learning activities appropriate to their cognitive abilities (Cameron, 2001). Proper scaffolding provided by the teacher will help students develop their skills gradually, and they will continue to be motivated to learn the language.

In previous research, two issues were found in TEYL learning in Indonesia. The first is an issue related to teachers who do not have an English background, and the second is the many problems in learning English. In the first issue, teachers with no educational background in English are less able to apply the principles of teaching English effectively; they experience difficulties in using English fully in the

classroom and have limited ability to create learning media that attract and manage students' centralized learning activities (Utami, 2022). The second issue is the many problems in teaching English, as research by Ibrahim et al., (2024), the main factors that challenge teachers include curriculum changes that affect students' English language proficiency levels and teachers' ability to implement learning plans, the emergence of student age gaps in class, and inconsistencies in teaching and assessment. Then, Noor et al., (2023) revealed that a monotonous school environment and less orderly student behavior can change a teacher's emotions. Changes in the curriculum are also a factor in teachers' challenges in teaching English. Low discipline in using English in class can also be a challenge, as can teachers' lack of attention to students, especially students not yet interested in English.

However, there is a gap between previous research relating to the challenges of elementary school English teachers who do not have a graduate background in English education (Utami, 2022). From the perspective of the location where the research was previously carried out in Bali, where English teachers in Bali may be more accustomed to using English due to a supportive environment, such as the presence of tourists, which requires Balinese people to be able to communicate in English. Meanwhile, this research was carried out in the Tasikmalaya area 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. In addition, if previous research focused on investigating the pedagogical content knowledge of non-English teachers, this research offers a more contextual investigation of the challenges and solutions of non-English teachers in classroom practice, including in the selection of materials, use of media, and implementation guided by the principles of TEYL.

B. Formulation of the Problem(s)

The question of the research is “What challenges and solutions occur in a Teaching English to Young Learners classroom in an elementary school in Tasikmalaya?”

C. Operational Definition(s)

1. Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL)

Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) is a specialized form of English language teaching for children aged 9 to 12 years old. This teaching focuses on developing basic language skills by applying methods adapted to the child's needs. It aims to build a good English language foundation and foster students' interest in learning English.

2. Teacher Challenges

Teacher challenges refer to the difficulties and limitations faced by a non-English teacher. These challenges include English language skills, as well as difficulties in pronunciation and understanding upper-class material. However, this challenge serves as an encouragement for teachers to enhance their teaching and classroom management skills throughout the learning process.

3. Teacher Solutions

Teacher solutions refer to the efforts made by a non-English teacher to overcome the challenges faced, such as creating a safe and comfortable learning environment, implementing interactive learning methods, and providing positive feedback and appreciation. This effort is made to engage students and maintain their interest in learning. This will increase their confidence and motivate them to participate in learning actively.

D. Aims of the Study

According to the research question, this study aims to investigate the challenges and solutions faced by an English teacher teaching at an elementary school in Tasikmalaya.

E. Significance(s) of the Study

1. Theoretical Significance

This research can validate existing theories in teaching foreign languages to young learners (such as Joan Kang Shin's and JoAnn (Jodi) Crandall's Theory) by placing them in the local Indonesian context. This study helps adapt global

theories to certain contexts, such as education in the Tasikmalaya region, which may have different needs and conditions from urban areas or other countries.

2. Practical Significance

This research can provide an understanding of the challenges teachers face and the solutions they implement to overcome similar problems in their school environment. It can also inspire teachers in other areas who face similar challenges. This can help teachers improve the quality of English learning, even with existing limitations.

3. Empirical Significance

This research adds empirical data regarding the conditions of English language teaching in elementary schools in Tasikmalaya, which can be used for further research. It can also be used as a recommendation for government policy to provide English language training for English teachers who do not have an English language education graduate background, especially in Tasikmalaya elementary schools.