

Teacher Readiness in Teaching English for Young Learners among Indonesian Preservice Primary Teachers

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Abstract

Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL), especially in the context of Indonesia, requires specific capacities of the teachers to manage the students and the learning process. However, challenges may appear due to the complexity of teaching English to young learners. It renders a question whether pre-service teachers have readiness to handle TEYL. This study involved 125 preservice primary school teachers joining Preservice Teacher Professional Education (PPG bagi Calon Guru) in a public university in Banten Province, Indonesia. This qualitative research employed questionnaire and interview techniques to gather the data. The data of preservice primary teachers' readiness towards this policy were collected. In addition, the challenges and the participants' expectations were examined. The results of the research indicate that most of the respondents do not know that English will be mandatory subject in primary school next year and classroom teachers will be required to teach this subject. The result of the study shows that that once they enter the teaching realm, most of them are ready to teach. To get prepared, they learn English and how to teach English for young learners. In terms of the biggest challenges that they might encounter are limited vocabulary and materials and speaking ability. They expected to get English for primary school subject as well as English training. To conclude, the university conducting Preservice Teacher Professional Education (PPG bagi Calon Guru) as well as the government should provide help for the students to set their readiness to teach English.

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher readiness has been a topic of interest among scholars in the English as foreign language (EFL) learning context in the last decade (Camlibel-Acar, 2017; Damar, Gürsoy, & Korkmaz, 2013; Jumrah & Sunra, 2024), highlighting the teachers'

motivation, confidence and capacity in administering the learning process, including the challenges. Camlibel-Acar (2017) found that while most pre-service teachers were willing to teach young learners due to internal and external motivations, some hesitated for personal reasons, with qualitative data showing shifts in perceptions after targeted training. Damar, Gürsoy, and Korkmaz (2013) emphasized that EFL teacher trainers support early language education, aligning with curriculum changes, and stress the need for age-appropriate methodologies and assessment techniques. Jumrah and Sunra (2024) revealed that pre-service teachers demonstrate moderate confidence in pedagogical skills but struggle with lesson planning, classroom management, and adaptive teaching strategies, highlighting the necessity for hands-on training. These studies underscore the need for more practical training in teacher education programs to enhance pre-service teachers' preparedness for real classroom challenges.

Teaching English in primary schools is considered as teaching English to young learners (TEYL) at the age of 7 – 12 who have specific characteristics as Slattery and Willis (2001) suggests that (1) the students are still learning to read and write in their first language, (2) they are developing as thinkers, (3) they can differentiate between the real and the imaginary, (4) they can plan and organize how best to conduct an activity, (5) they can collaborate, and (6) they can be reliable and take responsibility for class activities and routines.

Therefore, TEYL, especially in the context of Indonesia, requires specific capacities of the teachers, such as knowing about the children, how the children learn, how the children learn a language, how the children learn English as a foreign language, and should be able to do things to facilitate children learning English as a foreign language (Musthafa, 2010). Along with those specific requirements, teaching English in primary schools has its challenges, especially in Indonesia in which English is taught as a foreign language. The main challenges might be the status of English in curriculum, the lack of qualified English teacher, and insufficient of educational facilities (Cahyati & Madya, 2018; Sulistiyo, et.al, 2019; Pramesty, et.al, 2022; Suwanto & Rahman, 2022; Laila, et.al, 2023).

In the context of Indonesia, the teacher's readiness to teach English to young learners, has been investigated (Mutiah, et.al, 2020; Padmadewi, et.al, 2023; Anggraeni & Yusuf, 2023). However, very limited study examining the readiness of preservice primary school teachers to teach English. Mostly, the studies investigated

the preservice English teachers' readiness in teaching English, not specifically conducted in elementary school (Dewi, 2021; Syarifah, 2022; Aisyiyah, 2022; Jalmav & Subekti, 2022; Aeni, 2024). Thus, this study aims at finding out the preservice primary school teacher readiness to teach English, especially those joining the program of Preservice Teacher Professional Education (PPG bagi Calon Guru) as the new regulation also gives impact on this program.

More than two decades, the teaching of English in Indonesia has been known as "local contents" due to the decentralization of education in Indonesia (Jalal & Musthafa, 2001; Musthafa, 2010). English as local content means that one region to another might issue different policy regarding the teaching of English in their schools. Further, based on the 2013 curriculum, English is an extra-curricular activity, while the 2016 curriculum gave schools more autonomy in teaching English. However, a new regulation issued by Indonesian Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology number 12 Year 2024 shows that English will become a mandatory subject in Academic Year 2027/2028. This regulation also mentions that national government will provide training for teachers to teach English in primary schools to prepare the transition. One of the main challenges stated above is the English teacher's capacity. It seems that when the regulation about English as compulsory subject is implemented, this might even create bigger problems, especially in public schools. Therefore, examining the teachers' readiness to teach English is an urgency.

Given the explanation of the research background and research gap emerged from the previous studies, this research mainly focuses on gaining information about the Indonesian pre-service teachers' readiness to teach English to young learners and their perspectives regarding the relevant policy. To achieve the main objective, the research questions guide the present study.

1. How do the teachers demonstrate readiness in teaching English to young learners, based on their knowledge, pedagogical competences, and experiences?
2. How do the teachers view on the policy of teaching English in Primary school, with regard to teacher readiness?

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design as it embraces the characteristics of a case study. First, the present study aims to describe the phenomenon of teacher readiness among Indonesian pre-service EFL teachers, attending to the Preservice Teacher Professional Education (PPG bagi Calon Guru). Second, this research aims to delve into their perspectives regarding the policy of teaching English at Primary schools.

The research participants are 125 preservice primary school teachers joining four batches of PPG bagi Calon Guru in one public university in Banten Province, Indonesia. This qualitative research employed questionnaire and interview techniques to collect the data. The questionnaire was given to all participants designed to seek the students' readiness, challenges, and expectations dealing with the policy of teaching English in primary school. Further, 15 participants representing three batches of PPG bagi Calon Guru were interviewed to get deeper information.

The data gathered from questionnaire were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The data gathered from questionnaire were sorted and classified. Further, the data were displayed in the form of chart and description. Finally, the conclusions were drawn.

Meanwhile, the data garnered from interviews were analyzed by using thematic analysis (Braun, Clark, & Hayfield, 2022; Clark & Braun, 2017). This analysis technique suits with the data set, containing rich responses from the teacher participants to provide evidence regarding their readiness in teaching English for young learners in the Indonesian context. First, the researchers read and re-read the interview transcripts to get familiar with the data set. Second, each transcript was coded to capture the main information uttered in the responses for each question. The identified codes were further grouped into bigger themes. The themes were formulated to directly address the research question, based on the relationship of semantic meaning between the codes. Fourth, the themes were reviewed to ensure its clarity and relevance with the objective of the study. Finally, the refined themes were further explained, which comprise: teachers' reasons for being or not being ready to teach English for young learners, challenges encountered by the teachers, and teachers' expectations.

RESULT

RQ 1: How do the teachers demonstrate readiness in teaching English to young learners, based on their knowledge, pedagogical competences, and experiences?

Respondents' Knowledge about English as Mandatory Subject in Primary School

The information whether English will be mandatory subject in academic year 2027/2028 can be seen in Figure 1.

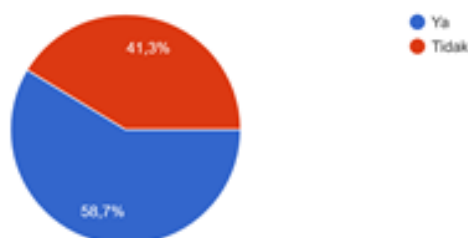


Figure 1. The information about English as a mandatory subject in primary school

Figure 1 shows that 58,7% of the respondents know the information about English as a mandatory subject, while 41.3% do not get the information.

Teachers' Readiness to Teach English in Primary School

Whether or not the respondents are ready to teach English in primary school is shown in Figure 2.

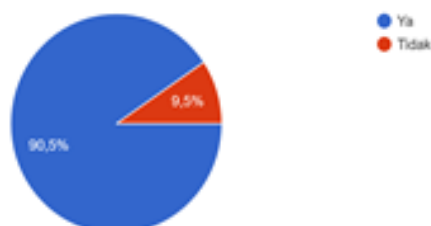


Figure 2. The Respondents' Readiness to Teach English in Primary School

Surprisingly, figure 2 shows that 90,5% of the respondents are ready to teach English in the primary school, while 8,5% of them are not ready to teach English.

The Extent of Teachers' Readiness to Teach English in Primary School

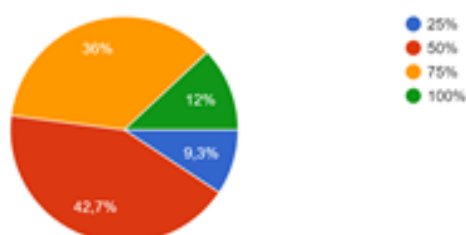


Figure 3. The Respondents' Readiness Percentage to Teach English in Primary School

Figure 3 shows that Only 12% respondents who are 100% ready to teach English. 30% of the respondents mention that their readiness is 75%. In addition, 42, 7% of them are 50% ready, and 9,3% of the respondents are 25% ready to teach English.

Reasons for not Being Ready to Teach English

Being asked about the reasons why the respondents are not 100% ready, they mostly mentioned the main reasons, such as the lack of English ability and confidence as noted by the respondents:

"I don't feel confident with my ability to teach English to children."

Respondent 8

"... because my ability in English is still very low. I have tried to learn vocabularies, but I still don't get it."

Respondent 11

"... because I don't really master English."

Respondent 14

Respondent 8 felt lack confidence in the capacity to instruct children in English. This implies that a major contributing factor to perceived lack of readiness is self-doubt. Respondents 11 and 14 acknowledge that they lack sufficient proficiency in English. Despite efforts to study, respondent 11 admits having trouble with vocabulary, showing challenges with language learning. Respondent 14 also expressed insufficient level of proficiency for teaching.

Teachers' Plan to Prepare Them Teach English in Primary School

Mostly, the respondents mention that they will learn English material (again), as noted by Respondent 1:

"I will learn English material."

Respondent 1

Another thing they will do to get prepared besides learning the material is by learning method to teach English in primary school as stated by Respondent 4, 48, and 71.

"I will get prepared in terms of English knowledge, learn the material, including the learning method or approaches to in teaching English in primary school."

Respondent 4

"I will enhance my skill in teaching English"

Respondent 48

"I will learn the effective strategy with various learning methods suitable with children..."

Respondent 71

One fundamental strategy mentioned by Respondent 1 is going over and mastering English content again. This suggests that some respondents understand that before they can effectively teach a language, they must improve their own understanding of it. Meanwhile, learning teaching methods and strategies was uttered by several other respondents. Respondent 4 places a strong emphasis on studying teaching

strategies and tactics tailored to primary school pupils in addition to acquiring English content. Respondent 48 focuses on enhancing teaching skills, suggesting that teaching English requires more than just language proficiency. Respondent 71 highlights the importance of effective strategies and various learning methods that are suitable for young learners, implying a need for child-centered, engaging teaching techniques.

The Challenges in Teaching English in Primary School

The interview results show that the first challenge the participants might face when teaching English in primary school is on the students' diverse abilities in English, as stated by Interviewee 2:

"One of them is the various levels of students' understanding. Some of the students easily understand the lesson, while others still need support."

Interviewee 2

Another challenge is how to deliver English to the students. Interviewee 4 noted:

"It is not easy to teach English to students in primary school, especially the lower grades."

Interviewee 4

Further, the next challenge is the English ability of the participants themselves as posited by Interviewee 11 and 14:

"... constrained by the low level of speaking ability."

Interviewee 11

"Maybe I have difficulties in pronouncing words."

Interviewee 14

The excerpts above exhibit three main challenges: students' diverse abilities, challenges in teaching delivery, and teachers' own English proficiency. The second interviewee emphasizes that the English skill of the pupils in a primary school classroom varies. While some students pick up the concepts quickly, others find it difficult and need more help. This implies that in order to accommodate pupils with diverse levels of comprehension, teachers must implement differentiated instruction. Interviewee 4 points out that teaching English to young learners, especially those in lower grades, is difficult. This may be due to their limited exposure to the language, short attention spans, or the need for engaging and interactive teaching methods. Teachers must find age-appropriate strategies to make learning effective and enjoyable. Speaking difficulties are mentioned by interviewee 11, which may have an impact on their self-assurance and efficacy while instructing spoken English. In order to illustrate proper English pronunciation for students, interviewee 14 admits to having trouble pronouncing words correctly.

RQ 2: How do the teachers view on the policy of teaching English in Primary school, with regard to teacher readiness?

Expectations on University Organizing Preservice Teacher Professional Education dealing with the Policy of English in Primary School

Based on the interview data, it is found out that the participants gave their expectations on university conducting Preservice Teacher Professional Education dealing with the policy of English in primary school. Mostly, they expected to have English for Primary School Teachers to be taught as one of subjects in Preservice Teacher Professional Education program, as posited by Interviewee 6 and 15:

"Give us English for Primary School subject in the in Preservice Teacher Professional Education program which contain the materials and strategies to teach English in primary school."

Interviewee 6

"Conducting English for Primary School subject in the Preservice Teacher Professional Education program for Primary School students"

Interviewee 15

The next expectation is that the university should provide training and workshop to prepare them teach English in primary school. Interviewee 8 stated:

"I hope there is a training about teaching English".

Interviewee 8

This statement is also posited by Interviewee 10:

"My expectation on PPG bagi Calon Guru organizer is that there is a training on the method to teach English to primary school students effectively."

Interviewee 10

The excerpts above demonstrate two main expectations from the teachers on the organizing university: inclusion of English for Primary school teachers as a subject and training or workshops for teaching English in Primary school. According to interviewees 6 and 15, colleges ought to add a specific course including both English teaching resources and efficient teaching techniques to the Preservice Teacher Professional Education (PPG) curriculum. This suggests a need for organized academic assistance that gives aspiring educators the language skills and pedagogical knowledge necessary for working with young students. Interviewees 8 and 10 stress the value of hands-on training, including workshops on teaching strategies and techniques for elementary school pupils. These answers imply that before they start teaching, preservice teachers feel the necessity for practical experience and exposure to authentic classroom situations.

Expectations on the Government dealing with the Policy of English in Primary School

The participants' main expectation on the government regarding the policy of the teaching of English in primary school is that the government provides training or

workshop to help them get prepared to teach English as posited by Interviewee 3, 12, and 14:

"I hope the government can give training to teach English to elementary school students."

Interviewee 3

"My hope is that the government provides training and continuous professional development for the teachers who are competent and confident in teaching English. The training must provide the teaching method, the use of technology, and appropriate approaches considering the children's characteristics."

Interviewee 12

"As a prospective teacher, I hope that the government can provide training and good human resources to support the teaching of English in primary school. Besides, the curriculum should match the students' development by integrating fun and effective teaching method. Finally, I hope there is an evaluation and continuous support to ensure the good English teaching quality."

Interviewee 14

In a similar vein, the teachers expose two main expectations on the government: provision of training and workshops and development of teacher capacity and curriculum. In order to help instructors become more equipped to teach English in elementary schools, Interviewees 3 and 12 emphasize the necessity of government-sponsored training. Interviewee 12 underscores that in order to guarantee that instructors are capable and self-assured in their positions, this training should address child-centered approaches, technological integration, and instructional methodologies. Additionally, teachers expect to develop their capacity to be more knowledgeable as teachers. as emphasized by interviewee 14. In order to make English classes interesting and appropriate for young students, they also emphasize that the content should be developmentally appropriate.

DISCUSSION

The present study has delineated the analysis results regarding teacher readiness in teaching English for young learners and their perspectives regarding the policy of teaching English in the Primary education level. It is found out that most of the participants are ready to teach English. However, most teachers demonstrate an average level of readiness. It must be given attention as the teacher readiness factor becomes one of the challenges in teaching English to young learners (Mutiah, et.al, 2020; Padmadewi, et.al, 2023; Angraeni & Yusuf, 2023).

The main reason of this unreadiness is the lack of their English ability. This result is in line with that of Asriyanti, et al (2013), Cahyati and Madya (2018), Sulistiyo, et.al (2019), Pramesty, et.al, (2022), Suwanto and Rahman (2022), and Laila, et.al, (2023) who argue that one of the challenges in teaching English to young learners in

Indonesia is the low capacity of the teachers. The low capacity of the teachers seems to give problems as teaching English to young learners, especially in Indonesia in which English is taught as a foreign language requires specific capacities as proposed by Musthafa (2010) such as understanding about the children, how the children learn, how the children learn a language, how the children learn English as a foreign language, and should be able to do things to facilitate children learning English as a foreign language.

Plan to Prepare Teaching English in Primary School

In order to get ready to teach English, the respondents mostly mentioned that they would learn (again) English material and English teaching method. The plan shows their self-awareness that increasing their own ability is a must. It is a part of the reflective practice as Farrel (2018) argues that teachers who carry out reflective practice can develop a deeper understanding of their teaching, assess their professional growth, develop informed decision-making skills, and become proactive and confident in their teaching.

The Challenges in Teaching English in Primary School

The first challenge that the respondents might find when teaching English to young learners is the various levels of students' ability. Students' abilities belong to students' readiness as Tomlinson (1995) argues. This can be copied by differentiating content, process, or product. Thus, it needs teachers who have capabilities in managing classroom.

The next challenge is how to teach English to the students. The respondent posited that teaching children might not be easy as Rich (2018) argues that, 'TEYL is a demanding and skilled process, particularly with children in the early grades of primary school' (p. 49). Further, Read (2003) suggests that the younger is the better when learning is: (1) natural, (2) contextualized and part of a real event, (3) Interesting and enjoyable, (3) relevant, (4) social, (5) belongs to the child, (6) has a purpose for the child, (7) builds on things the child knows but also challenges the child, (8) supported appropriately, (9) part of a coherent whole, (10) multisensory, (11) active and experiential, (12) memorable, (13) designed to provide for personal, divergent responses and multiple intelligences, and (14) offered in a relaxed and warm learning atmosphere. The last challenge is coming from the respondents' English ability. This is in line with the previous discussion on the reason of their unreadiness.

Expectations on the University Organizing Preservice Primary School Teacher Education and Government Regarding the Policy of Teaching English in Primary School

Providing English for Primary School Teacher subject as one of subjects taught in Preservice Primary School Teacher Education is expected by the research participants. This subject is important as the knowledge of English and how English is taught is needed by these prospective teachers. Hopefully, this subject can facilitate the students of Preservice Primary School Teacher Education to prepare them teach English to young learners who learn differently from others. Therefore, they can be prepared as Pinter (2006) suggests that the teachers of English to young learners should play roles as a facilitator, guide, and role model who are flexible, creative, and empathetic to effectively support young learners. The next expectation is that both university or government should provide training or workshop to help these prospective teachers get ready to teach English. The workshop or training is expected to provide the teaching method and strategies to teach English to young learners.

CONCLUSION

The present study has achieved the objective to delve into the Indonesian preservice EFL teachers' readiness in teaching English for young learners as well as their expectations on the teaching English in Primary schools. The results generally show that the teacher respondents joining Preservice Primary School Teacher Professional Education are ready to teach English with some requirements. The requirements are in terms of the capabilities of English and teaching English to young learners. Such demands become the driving factor of challenges faced by the teachers, not only related to insufficient proficiency of English but also inadequate pedagogical skills, including teaching delivery to young learners. They further expect that the university organizing Preservice Professional Teacher Education as well as the government provide trainings or workshops to build their English skill and classroom management skills.

The results of the present study can be used for expanding the scholarship of EFL teacher readiness and the factors driving the teachers to take no initiatives to develop their self-capacity toward increased readiness in teaching. Hence, future

research is recommended to continue the discussion by empirically investigating the impact of government and institutional support on the teachers' readiness level.

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