



## **Optimizing English Language Teaching in Elementary School Based on Merdeka Curriculum**

**Tri Achmad Efendi<sup>1\*</sup>, Apsari Fajar Prihantini<sup>2</sup>, Sri Nurhidayah<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1-3</sup> STKIP Bina Insan Mandiri Surabaya Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author, email: triachmad@stkipbim.ac.id

Submission: 11-10-2024

Accepted: 28-11-2024

---

---

### **Abstract**

In globalization and 5.0 industry, English has been a mandatory skill a student should have. However, at elementary level, the teaching and learning of English seems neglected. It could be revealed from the researchers' preliminary study in one of the state elementary schools in Menganti, Gresik that the school doesn't have any English teachers, resulting homeroom teachers or other subject teachers teaching the students. Besides, grammar was still the center of teaching as well as the teachers had much worry about grammar since their basics was not English. On account of that, the researchers conducted a mentorship to optimize the teaching and learning English in Elementary schools. The mentorship program was held in one day due to the limited time. The participants of this program were 12 teachers who taught English in that school. The activity was done by emphasizing on what and how English language teaching focuses on. Later, the material examples were given as a means of presenting language learning. Finally, the question and answer were provided so that the participants of this program could have a better understanding. The program ran smoothly and successfully and the participants seemed enthusiasts

**Keywords:** Elementary School, Merdeka Curriculum, English

---

---

### **Introduction**

Students nowadays live in the era where they have to equip with enough skills to compete in the workforce, one of them is the ability to use English as a means of communication tool in the 21st century. Being proficient in English will lead them to a greater opportunity in the future (Aziza 2020; Nishanthi 2018). Therefore, English is supposed to be included as a core subject in school level. Due to the English role as a foreign subject in Indonesia, school should be a place that could maximize students' English skills by giving more exposure and effective teaching and learning activities. In the EFL context, English is only used at particular places, and limited to certain occasions.

Speaking of English language teaching in Indonesia, many schools, starting from elementary school, have been included English as a core subject in their schools. However, the results remain unsatisfactory (Efendi and Sejati 2024; Sandra Rahmawati et al. 2020; Suryani and Amalia 2018), it could also be seen from the survey conducted by EF in 2023 which revealed that Indonesian English proficiency is still low compared to other countries in south east Asia such as Thailand and Vietnam which historically, those two countries were behind Indonesia.

Due to those facts, it seems mandatory to teach students English since they are young because children at the age of seven or below twelve are at their golden age which make them learn quicker and more effectively than adults or teenagers (Cameron 2001; Harmer 2019). However, teaching this group is challenging because they have got unique characteristics such as energetic, short attention span, and getting bored easily (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2019; Nunan, 2016).

The uniqueness of them should be consideration for teachers to conduct interesting, fun, and enjoyable for young learners so that they can engage in the teaching and learning process. Besides, teachers should create ample opportunity for them to be involved in the process as they like to practice directly and do hands on activities rather than to sit and listen to the teacher's explanation (Harmer 2008).

That is why activities in the classroom are supposed to be carefully selected and designed to help them gain confidence and gain their language performance and competence. Teachers should avoid such activities which lead them to be afraid of trying. Shortly, teaching strategies for young learners encompass a wide range of instructional approaches and techniques tailored to the developmental needs and characteristics of children. These strategies aim to promote active engagement, meaningful learning, and holistic development, setting a strong foundation for their educational journey.

However, the preliminary research conducted by Efendi et al. (2024) found out that the English language teaching at the school was not implemented well. The findings also showed that English language teaching

was not maximally done by the teachers. The indicators were; (1) grammar teaching was emphasized rather than communicative classroom, (2) listening skill is neglected as the students were rarely given opportunity to have listening activity, (3) the teachers mostly used Bahasa Indonesia as a means of language instruction in the classroom, (4) students-speaking activity was also hardly ever done by the teachers. In short, the teaching and learning was done traditionally using one of the oldest methods in English language teaching; Grammar-Translation Method. Therefore, this current community service was an attempt to help the teachers implement a better communicative teaching practice to face a new academic year where English is a mandatory subject in Merdeka curriculum.

Such implementation does not meet the teaching and learning designed in Merdeka curriculum which objectives are to sharpen students' English skills through engaging activities as well as sharpening speaking and students' oral skills. Therefore, the primary goal of this community service project was to provide valuable support to English teachers working in one of the elementary schools located in Gresik. The project aimed to enhance the quality of English language instruction within the Merdeka curriculum. This initiative stemmed from the insights gathered through a research study conducted at the same educational institution.

The research findings indicated that the English language classes were predominantly taught by non-English teachers. Moreover, it was observed that the majority of these teachers were graduates with a background in homeroom teaching, specifically in the field of PGSD. Consequently, the community service efforts were directed towards assisting these educators in developing their English language teaching skills and strategies. This support was designed to empower the teachers to create a more conducive learning environment for the students, thereby improving the overall quality of English instruction at the school. By facilitating the professional growth of the teachers and addressing the existing gaps in language education, the community service initiative sought to contribute positively to the academic development of both the instructors and the students. The collaborative nature of this project highlighted

the importance of fostering a culture of continuous improvement and learning within the educational system, ultimately benefiting the broader community through enhanced English language learning outcomes.

## **Methods**

The community service initiative took place at Menganti Public Primary School 1, where a group of twelve dedicated teachers participated. Despite having no formal background in English education, all these teachers were eager to learn and improve their English language skills. The program focused on enhancing their teaching abilities by introducing key concepts of English language instruction as outlined in the Merdeka Curriculum. In order to achieve this goal, a variety of methods were employed, including socializing activities and informative seminars. These activities allowed the teachers to engage with new ideas and teaching strategies, ultimately helping them to better understand how to effectively teach English to their students. Through this community service project, the participating teachers were not only able to enhance their own language proficiency but also gained valuable insights into innovative teaching approaches. The collaborative and supportive environment fostered during the project encouraged the teachers to actively participate and implement what they had learned in their classrooms. Overall, this community service initiative served as a platform for professional growth and development for the teachers, paving the way for them to become more confident and effective educators in the field of English language teaching.

A preliminary study was first conducted to capture a comprehensive overview of the English teaching and learning practices at the specified school. This initial investigation aimed to verify that the community service initiatives were on track and yielding positive results. Following this exploratory phase, a deliberate effort was made to foster greater social interaction within the realm of optimizing English language instruction. This endeavor culminated in the organization of a seminar, which was identified as the most practical approach given the teachers' busy schedules as they prepared for the onset of a new academic year. In essence, the seminar served as a platform for educators to engage in meaningful discussions, share best practices, and exchange

innovative ideas to enhance the overall quality of English language education within the school community. The collaborative nature of this seminar not only facilitated professional development but also promoted a sense of camaraderie among the teaching staff. By leveraging this interactive forum, the school successfully harnessed the collective expertise and enthusiasm of its educators to drive continuous improvement in the delivery of English language instruction.

The seminar, which took place over the course of one day lasting approximately three hours, encompassed a comprehensive exploration of various crucial topics in the field of English language teaching. The informative sessions delved into the historical development of English curriculum in Indonesia, shedding light on its evolution and impact. Furthermore, a detailed examination of the concept of English Language Teaching (ELT) within the framework of the Merdeka curriculum provided valuable insights for the participants. Special emphasis was placed on the creation and implementation of teaching materials tailored specifically for young learners, particularly elementary school students, aiming to enhance their language learning experience. Additionally, an in-depth discussion on teaching methodology in Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL) was conducted, offering practical strategies and approaches to effectively engage and educate young language learners. Overall, the seminar served as a dynamic platform for educators to enhance their knowledge and skills in the field of English language teaching, fostering a deeper understanding of key principles and practices essential for successful language education in diverse learning environments.

### **Result and Discussion**

The findings from focus group discussion revealed that so far, the teacher focused on teaching vocabulary and grammar. They taught the students both of those language components because they taught that those were the most important element in understanding and using English. Additionally, they shared their experience of learning English when they were in school back then and they were taught English through grammar and vocabulary. Further,

translation was used as a means of teaching instruction in the daily teaching and learning process.

What the teacher expressed deemed the progress of students' communicative practices in this contemporary educational practice which was promoted recently by the government. The lack of English practices and focus on forms could slow down the students' potential to reach the communicative competence (Latifa, Ratih, and Maryadi 2023; Sephiawardani and Bektiningsih 2023). Focusing on translation and grammar or conducting GTM practices in this current teaching seem no relevant since students nowadays should have 4Cs skills (Creativity, Critical thinking, Communication, and collaboration). Those skills could not be achieved unless teachers actively encouraged and did innovative teaching (Kakhramonovich 2021; Rahmawati 2018; Dos Santos 2020; Thamarana 2015).

Therefore, this community service tried to give the participants insight on what and how to optimize the English language teaching in this current curriculum. The facilitators tried to give a perspective on how the teaching and learning in elementary school should be done.

The first coverage of this insightful seminar was the history of English language teaching and its curriculum in Indonesia. The teachers were provided with the rich history of English language teaching and the evolution of its curriculum within the educational landscape of Indonesia. This notion is important to be understood by the participants to learn from the previous curriculums and teaching practices. On account of that, they could draw lessons and inspiration from previous curriculum and teaching methodologies. In this case, the participants were given information that teaching and learning, especially at elementary school level, does not much change even though the curriculum has changed several times. One of the reasons why it happens is due to the teacher's factor. They could not implement the demand of the curriculum (Suminar et al. 2019; Zein et al. 2020). This historical overview not only sheds light on the roots of language education in Indonesia but also highlights the continuous efforts and innovations that have contributed to shaping the current landscape of English language instruction in Indonesia. Embracing this

knowledge offers a pathway for the participants to bridge the gap between tradition and innovation.

Figure 1  
Presenting The Material



The next topic of discussion was about the concept of ELT within the Merdeka curriculum. As it is known that Merdeka curriculum mandates English as one of the compulsory subjects in elementary school level and it is designed to enhance the educational experience, places particular emphasis on making English as practical knowledge not as a passive knowledge. This is meant to signify a pivotal shift towards sharpening language proficiency and communication skills among young learners, thereby equipping them with a strong foundation in English from an early age.

The decision made by the government to incorporate English as a mandatory subject in elementary education showcases a forward-thinking approach that acknowledges the crucial role of global communication in today's interconnected world. By emphasizing the importance of English as a widely-used lingua franca, the curriculum demonstrates a strong commitment to preparing students for success in an increasingly diverse and competitive global landscape. This strategic alignment of English Language Teaching (ELT) within the Merdeka curriculum not only underscores the significance of attaining proficiency in English but also signifies the curriculum's dedication to nurturing individuals who are well-equipped to thrive in a complex and interconnected society. It reflects a broader educational philosophy that

prioritizes the development of well-rounded and culturally aware individuals who are capable of navigating the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly evolving globalized world. In integrating English language skills within the curriculum, the government recognizes the pivotal role that language plays in facilitating cross-cultural understanding, promoting collaboration, and empowering individuals to engage meaningfully with the international community. This proactive approach not only strengthens students' linguistic abilities but also equips them with the tools needed to communicate effectively, think critically, and engage thoughtfully with a wide range of global perspectives and experiences.

As it was previously mentioned that the participants who were not from the English education department designed their teaching practices with grammar and vocabulary, it is not in line with the spirit of the Merdeka curriculum. Through this engaging seminar, the participants delved and explored into discussion of their misconception of teaching English for young learners in which grammar should not be excessively emphasized. The highlight of the discussion was the importance of creating a dynamic and interactive teaching and learning activity meanwhile the language component such as grammar and vocabulary could be infused organically through practice and contextual application.

After providing the knowledge and concept of teaching and learning English for young learners in the Merdeka curriculum, the participants were given examples of what are supposed to be taught in teaching English for young learners. The presenters underscored two main key points in the earlier research; the insufficiency of English exposure and the limited opportunities to practice. Therefore, in this time, the presenters proposed communicative activity based on listening and speaking for their students, and suggested to avoiding writing activity, especially for lower grades. The presenters see these two skills (listening and speaking) are crucial aspects to develop English language for young learners. Additionally, the presenters aimed to shed light on the importance of creating more opportunities for individuals to immerse themselves in an English-speaking environment and engage in regular practice



to enhance their language skills effectively. By providing this insight, the presenters tried to raise awareness about the pivotal role of exposure and practice play in language learning.

The last topic of this seminar was to immerse the participants with the teaching methodology in TEYL. The objective was to provide participants with an immersive experience that would deepen their understanding of how to effectively educate young minds in the English language. Through interactive presentations, hands-on activities, and lively discussions, the seminar aimed to equip teachers with the necessary tools and strategies to create engaging and impactful lessons tailored to the unique needs of young learners. By exploring various approaches and techniques, educators were encouraged to adapt their teaching styles to better resonate with the dynamic learning styles of children. The seminar's emphasis on practical application and real-world examples helped participants gain valuable insights and practical skills that they could integrate into their own teaching practices.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this current community service highlighted the importance of shifting from a grammar-oriented approach to a more communicative English language teaching method which in line with the government's policy in Merdeka curriculum. The seminar provided historical context, curriculum insights, and practical teaching methodologies to equip educators with the tools to create engaging English lessons for young learners in the evolving educational landscape of Indonesia. In addition, it emphasized the need for more exposure to and practice in English, focusing on listening and speaking skills rather than just grammar and vocabulary.

### **Acknowledgment**

The writers would like to express their gratitude to STKIP Bina Insan Mandiri Surabaya that support them financially as well as to all participants at SDN I Menganti, Gresik who have shown their efforts in enriching their knowledge to aid their teaching practices especially in English teaching.

## References

- Aziza, Niyozova. 2020. "The Importance of English Language."
- Cameron, Lynne. 2001. *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. Cambridge university press.
- Efendi, Tri Achmad, Sri Nurhidayah, Apsari Fajar Prihantini, Jurnal Basataka, Stkip Bina, and Insan Mandiri. 2024. *A Portrait Of English Language Teaching In Elementary School By Non-English Major Teachers*. Vol. 7.
- Efendi, Tri Achmad, and Devo Bayu Panggah Sejati. 2024. "Scrutinizing English Proficiency Of Junior High School Students Based On Cefr." *Jurnal Koulutus* 7(1):21–30.
- Harmer, Jeremy. 2008. *How to Teach English*. Vol. 62. Oxford University Press.
- Harmer, Jeremy. 2019. "The Routledge Handbook of English Language Teaching."
- Kakhramonovich, Amanov Alisher. 2021. "Principles of Communicative Competence and Its Practical Reflection on Homework." *Galaxy International Interdisciplinary Research Journal* 9(12):480–84.
- Latifa, Helmia, Koesoemo Ratih, and Maryadi Maryadi. 2023. "Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in English Language Teaching: A Study of Teacher Learning Steps." *VELES (Voices of English Language Education Society)* 7(3):640–51. doi: 10.29408/veles.v7i3.24049.
- Nikolov, Marianne, and Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović. 2019. "Teaching Young Language Learners." *Second Handbook of English Language Teaching* 577–99.
- Nishanthi, Rajathurai. 2018. "The Importance of Learning English in Today World." *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development Volume-3(Issue-1)*:871–74. doi: 10.31142/ijtsrd19061.
- Nunan, David. 2016. "Teaching English to Young Learners." Pp. 68–81 in *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*. Routledge.
- Rahmawati, Yenny. 2018. "Teachers' Perspective On The Implementation Of Communicative Approach In Indonesian Classrooms." *IJEE (Indonesian Journal of English Education)* 5(1). doi: 10.15408/ijee.v5i1.9881.
- Sandra Rahmawati, Alifa, Didik Murwantono, Zidni Maruf, and Eka Siswantara. 2020. "Long Walk to Quality Improvement: Investigating Factors Causing Low English Proficiency among Indonesian EFL Students 4 READS 314 4 Authors, Including: Zidni Ma'ruf Sriwijaya State Polytechnic Long Walk to Quality Improvement: Investigating Factors Causing Low English Proficiency among Indonesian EFL Students." *Article in International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*.
- Dos Santos, Luis Miguel. 2020. "The Discussion of Communicative Language Teaching Approach in Language Classrooms." *Journal of Education and E-Learning Research* 7(2):104–9.
- Sephiawardani, Nabila Asti, and Kurniana Bektiningsih. 2023. "Review of Teacher Readiness in Implementing Merdeka Curriculum at Public Elementary Schools." *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran* 56(3):533–42. doi: 10.23887/jpp.v56i3.67628.
- Suminar, Anne, Pipih Setiawati, Lucky Nurjain, and Yustika Fajriah. 2019. "Indonesian EYL Curriculum Issues: Between Education Policy and Classroom Practices." in *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on*

*Business, Law And Pedagogy, ICBLP 2019, 13-15 February 2019, Sidoarjo, Indonesia.*

- Suryani, Hilma, and Shynta Amalia. 2018. "Students' English Proficiency: The Case of One Madrasah in Jambi City." *Ta'dib: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 23(2):194–201.
- Thamarana, Simhachalam. 2015. "A Critical Overview of Communicative Language Teaching." *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities* 3(5):90–100.
- Zein, Subhan, Didi Sukyadi, Fuad Abdul Hamied, and Nenden Sri Lengkanawati. 2020. "English Language Education in Indonesia: A Review of Research (2011-2019)." *Language Teaching* 53(4):491–523.

