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**Submission date:** 07-Jun-2024 10:33PM (UTC+0700)

**Submission ID:** 2303743515

**File name:** Manuscript\_Nurfadilah\_Eryansyah\_Amrullah.docx (341K)

**Word count:** 5778

**Character count:** 33310

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## English Teachers' Problems in Teaching English as a Local Content at Primary Schools

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### Abstract

This research aimed to find out what problems English teachers had in teaching English as local content at primary schools and how English teachers solved the problems. The research employed a case study design grounded in qualitative methods. The participants were four English teachers at two different public primary schools in the subdistrict of Prabumulih Timur. Research data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and observations. In analysing the collected data, percentage analysis was used for questionnaires and thematic analysis for interviews and observations. The questionnaire's results revealed a number of noteworthy findings, including the fact that some teachers lack knowledge of technology and that students regard elementary school textbooks to be excessively difficult and boring. Interviews and observation also uncovered other difficulties, including job load, limited time, classroom management, technology use, teaching administration, and the complexity of the topic. These results suggest that in order for EFL teachers to successfully teach English in public elementary schools, they must have techniques to deal with every issue that arises. To help instructors teach as effectively as possible, the government must strike a balance between the amount of time allotted for studying English at SDN/MIN and the subject matter that needs to be covered.

### Keywords

English teaching, problems, primary schools

### Article History

Received

Accepted

### How to cite:

Nurfadila, S. Eryansyah, E., & Amrullah, A. (2024). English teachers' problems in teaching English as a local content at primary schools. *Indonesian Research Journal in Education | IRJE |*, 8(1), pp – pp. <https://doi.org/>

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## Introduction

In Indonesia, English is treated like a subject in school, not a language for everyday use. Sulistiyo (2015) showed that English is learned formally, not through speaking. Crystal (2012) confirmed that Indonesia is among the countries that officially consider English a foreign language, but valuable for global connections. In Indonesian elementary schools, English was once part of the local content curriculum. As outlined in the Minister of Education and Culture Decree No. 060/U/1993, English instruction was needed to be incorporated into local socio-cultural elements of Indonesian society. The inclusion of English depended on each school policy to develop its own curriculum and provided necessary resources. However, in 2013, the government introduced a new curriculum called the 2013 curriculum that excluded English from primary school education. This policy was made clear in the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 67 of 2013, which details the primary school curriculum where English is not mentioned as a subject on pages 9-10.

Despite English not being part of the 2013 curriculum, some public primary schools, such as SDN 50 and MIN 1 in East Prabumulih, continue to offer it as a local content subject. Brief information from the MIN 1 Prabumulih curriculum's representative indicates that English is still taught as a local content although the 2013 curriculum has no longer included it. Information from the principal of SDN 50 Prabumulih reveals that English has been taught again since 2020. It has been applied as a local content from grade 1 to 6 with only two English teachers.

That English is still taught as a local content with no support from the curriculum will surely create challenges and problems for English teachers. Teaching English needs a syllabus even though it is a local content. Therefore, English teachers may face a range of challenges, including the lack of a defined syllabus and difficulties in using learning tools (Kiely, 2014). Role of schools is important to help solving the issues. Schools can effectively assist and support teachers in teaching English if they have the necessary resources, including media resources, textbooks, technology, and qualified teachers (Cahyati & Madya, 2018).

Some preliminary studies have explored these issues. A study conducted by Kaltsum and Habibiy (2020) looks at the resources elementary English teachers use to teach the language as well as their attempts to put government regulations on English as a local content curriculum into practice. The results demonstrated that teachers were not concerned about implementing policies and had not included local content in their lesson plans, media, syllabi, or learning resources. Another study done by Saban and Kasim (2021) identified that English teachers face difficulties in preparing lesson plans under the 2013 curriculum. Listia and Kamal (2013) highlighted problems

such as limited teaching materials and methods. From all the studies above, none of them focused on how English was delivered as a local content in primary schools. It is the focus of this study to investigate the challenges faced by teachers in delivering English as a local content subject.

### Literature Review

Teaching English in elementary school involves working with younger students. They are 6–12 years old and will arrive with varying degrees of English proficiency (Cahyati & Madya, 2019). According to Singleton and Ryan (2004), there are several advantages to teaching English in elementary schools, such as giving students more opportunities to learn about different cultures and fostering tolerance towards those who are different, making the best use of their time to learn critical language. (the earlier you start teaching a language, the better), and allow them to use language texts as learning resources. It could be argued that because children have more favorable characteristics than adults, they have a greater opportunity than adults to learn a language. In line with Singleton and Ryan (2004), Widagsa and Khusnia (2023) emphasized that elementary schools are better places to introduce English than junior high schools. Thus, teaching foreign languages from an early age will accelerate the development of cognitive abilities.

Since 1994, Indonesian primary schools have taught English. This idea was incorporated into the curriculum in 1994 when English was designated as a local subject. Students must learn local content, which is defined as an educational program whose content and distribution mediums are relevant to the social, cultural, and natural contexts of the region. Article 39 paragraphs (2) and (3) of Law Number 2 of 1989 concerning the National Education System and Article 14 paragraph (2) of Government Regulation Number 28 of 1989, which pertains to English including nine years of basic education, both specify the elements of the basic education curriculum. English was introduced to students early by the Indonesian government in 1994 through the Basic Education Curriculum, which started in grade IV of elementary school (at the age of 10). In 2004, the Competency Based Curriculum (KBK) was implemented to replace the 1994 Curriculum. Kasmaini (2009) noted that the English language subjects in the 2004 curriculum or KBK were the same as the previous curriculum, namely local content subjects taught in class IV with a frequency of once a week with total time 2a x 45 minutes. After that, in 2006, the Education Unit Level Curriculum (KTSP) is developed according to the educational level of each unit, with the school being primarily responsible while still adhering to national guidelines. The National Education Standards Agency (BSNP), an independent organization, prepares the Guidelines for Developing Curriculum. KTSP is developed according to the educational level of each unit, with

the school being primarily responsible while still adhering to national guidelines. The National Education Standards Agency (BSNP), an independent organization, prepares the Guidelines for Developing Curriculum (Sholeh & Anam, 2020). It is stated that English is a means of communicating verbally and in writing. In 2014, English is seen as an extracurricular activity after the 2013 curriculum revisions were put into place based on recommendations from teachers (Azmy, 2020). Kaltsum (2016) stated in his research on Minister of Education and Culture Regulation no. 67 of 2013 concerning the elementary school curriculum, pages 9 – 10, does not mention the existence of English as a subject in elementary schools. With the reading of Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 67 of 2013 concerning the Elementary School Curriculum, various questions arise regarding the implementation of English language subjects in elementary schools, whether they are included as local content (such as regional languages) or extracurricular.

Teaching English in elementary schools is not easy because the way of teaching children is different from the way of teaching adults. In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), teaching challenges are of primary concern due to their far-reaching impact on the ELT process and their broad nature in certain areas Noor et al. (2023). Difficulties associated with teaching English in the classroom affect the teacher and external factors that can influence the teacher's development in teaching in the classroom. The problems that occur can be divided into two factors, namely internal factors and external factors. Internal factors refer to pedagogy, motivation, and identity; External factors include textbooks, learning resources, English teacher level, and class size (Cahyati & Madya, 2019). According to Utomo et al. (2020), elementary school English teachers face seven problems when teaching the language, namely as follows: Lack of Educational Resources, Teaching Design, Class Management, ICT Proficiency, Educational Management: 2013 Curriculum Teacher Administration, Course outline, RPP (learning plan).

## Methodology

### *Research design, site, and participants*

This research employed a case study design that was grounded in qualitative research. Yin (2018) defines case studies as a pragmatic research method that investigates phenomena in their authentic environments. Case studies aim to uncover the underlying reasons behind guiding concepts through thorough evaluations of specific individuals, groups, or events. Hence, this study employed qualitative research and a case study design to investigate the challenges faced by English teachers when teaching English as local content in elementary schools. The study was conducted

out at two schools, namely SDN 50 Prabumulih and MIN 1 Prabumulih, situated in the East Prabumulih Sub-district, South Sumatra. The reason for selecting this setting was because both schools incorporate English as a local content subject in their curriculum, following the 2013 guidelines for grades 3, 4, 5, and 6. However, these particular schools also follow an independent curriculum for grades 1, and 2. The study involved a total of four participants, specifically two English instructors from SDN 50 Prabumulih and two English teachers from MIN 1 Prabumulih. Initially, four teachers completed the questionnaire, however, towards the end, only three teachers consented to being interviewed and observed, citing personal reasons.

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

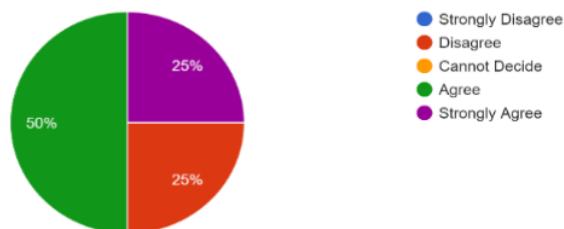
The data were collected through a questionnaire, interview, and observation. The questionnaire was adapted from Tabassum et al. (2022), and the interview was adapted from Tabassum et al. (2022). A percentage will be used to analyze the questionnaires. There are ten questions used in the questionnaire (arranged into 5 Likert Scale: strongly agree, agree, cannot decide, disagree, strongly disagree).

Thematic Analysis (TA) was employed to examine the interview and observation data. TA is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) across data sets. This approach enabled researchers to discern and understand shared meanings and experiences. The analysis followed six phases: (1) familiarizing with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

#### **Findings and Discussions**

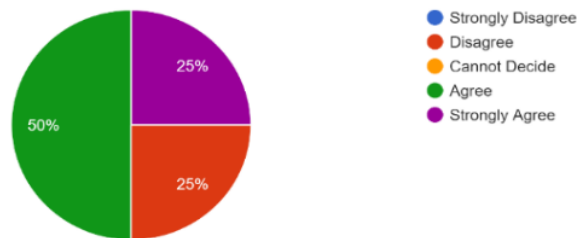
Based on the findings from the questionnaire about the problems of teaching English in Public schools.

**Figure 1.** *Difficulty of English Textbooks*



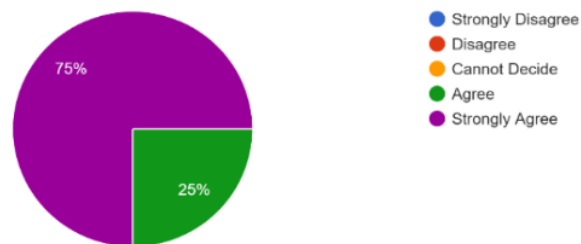
Finding from the first item of the questionnaire showed that 75% of the teachers (50% agreed and 25% strongly agreed) agreed that the content of the textbook used was difficult for the students to understand. This means that majority of them found that they had difficulty in using the textbook as the teaching material for English at the schools.

**Figure 2.** *Whether the Textbook is Boring for Students*



Finding from the second item of the questionnaire showed that majority of the teachers (50% agreed and 25% strongly agreed) shared the same opinion that the textbook used was boring.

**Figure 3.** *If All Primary Teachers are Qualified in The English Language*



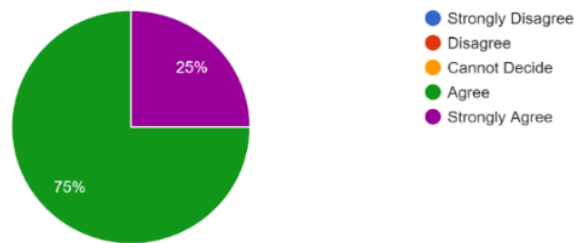
Finding from item number three of the questionnaire revealed that all primary teachers (75% strongly agreed and 25% agreed) were qualified in the English language.

**Figure 4.** *Contemporary Technology and Primary Teachers' Acquaintance*



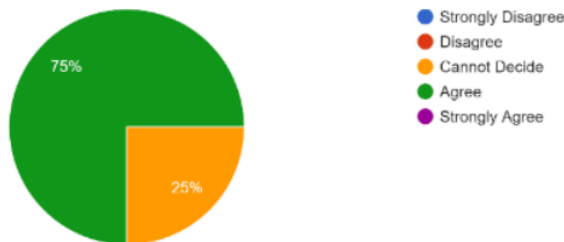
Finding from item number four of the questionnaire revealed that half of the respondents (50%) were not familiar with contemporary technology used in class, and half of the respondents (50%) understood contemporary technology used in class.

**Figure 5.** *Training of Primary Teachers in English Language*



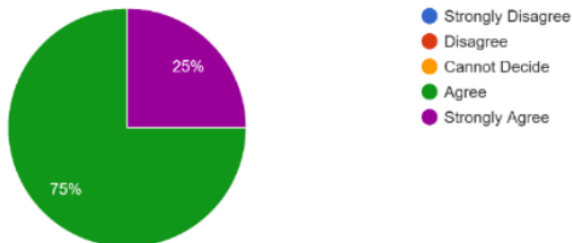
Finding from item number five of the questionnaire revealed that all the teachers (75% agreed and 25% strongly agreed) had been trained in English teaching.

**Figure 6.** *Inclusion of Montessori*



Finding from item number six of the questionnaire showed that majority of English teachers (75%) supported the Montessori method to be taught in elementary schools.

**Figure 7.** *Arrangement of Regular Refresher Course for Primary ELT*





Finding from item number seven of the questionnaire pointed that all the primary teachers (75% agreed and 25% strongly agreed) about arrangement of regular refresher course for primary ELT.

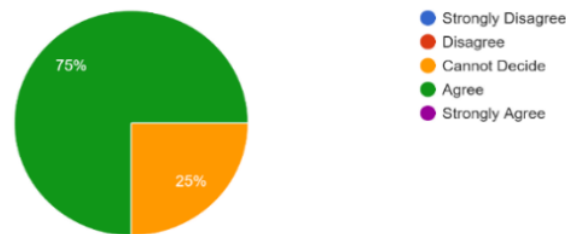
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**Figure 8. Regular Use of Lesson Plans by the Primary ELT Teachers**



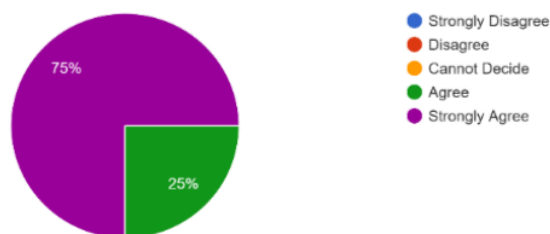
Finding from item number eight of the questionnaire showed that all the primary school teachers (50% agreed and 50% strongly agreed) had prepared the lesson plans for their English teaching.

**Figure 9. Effectiveness of Current Teaching Methods**



Findings from item number nine of the questionnaire can be interpreted that the majority of respondents (75% strongly agreed) the current teaching methods they used were effective.

1

3  
Figure 10. Pedagogical Approach by the English Language Teachers in Classrooms

3 Finding from item number ten of the questionnaire pointed out the results of a very large tower of respondents who thought that the pedagogical approach was adopted. According to the data shown, all the English teachers (strongly agreed 75% and 25%) that the pedagogical approach was the right approach to adopt in English teaching classrooms.

From all the findings from questionnaire above, it could be concluded that basically there were three problems the English teachers had in teaching English as local content for the elementary school students. Two of them were related to the textbooks they used which were hard to use the textbooks as the teaching materials and the content of the textbooks was also boring. Another problem was related to the English teachers' mastery of current technology used in English teaching.

The second data were collected from the interview and observations. The interview sessions were conducted at each school. The interviews were conducted with English teachers to answer two research questions and continued with classroom observations which were carried out over 3 meetings. The researcher found five problems experienced by English teachers, namely the level of material difficulty, classroom management, use of technology, job load, and limited time allocation, which were explained below.

The first problem was the level of difficulty of the textbook material. Book material that was too difficult for students to understand; thus, it got students not interested in learning. As indicated in the following interview excerpts.

"... it's like they don't know the meaning, their pronunciation and vocabulary are very minimal." (Teacher A (SR)). This was also mentioned by teacher B (BN), as indicated in the following interview excerpts.

"... firstly the meaning of English, secondly the way of pronunciation, lack of knowledge of English vocabulary." (Teacher B (BN))

The second problem was class management. Teachers' experience when teaching English in primary schools was managing the class, where the teacher had to control students who were passive from becoming active, and the teacher had to create conditions for the class to remain. As indicated in the following interview excerpts.

"...sometimes there is one class where almost all the students are active in learning." (Teacher A (SR))

"... often the conditions in the class when I teach are noisy." (Teacher B (BN)) added more according to another teacher, "... they learn more while playing, they cannot yet be given orders."

The third problem was the use of technology. Technology is one of the supports for teaching. However, after conducting interviews with three English teachers in two schools. It turned out that technology was limited in its facilities and use and the ability to use technology was still lacking.

"...for the technology itself, there's only one for information at school so I rarely use it." (Teacher A (SR))

"...for English lessons itself, I have never used a projector to teach English, but for other media/technology such as speakers." (Teacher A (SR) & Teacher C (SF))

"... never at all, because I don't understand how to use it." (Teacher B (BN))

Fourth, Job Load. Job Load has increased due to teaching administration such as a syllabus that is not in the 2013 curriculum so teachers have to look for resources to adopt or create their own.

"...it's true that we don't have a syllabus from the government." (Teacher A (SR))

The role of teachers is not only to teach in one class but also some teach English from the class. 1 to 6 classes, and for the classes themselves there are sometimes four local classes (classes).

"...it adds to the teacher's work because in English there is no ready-to-use syllabus. So, a little wasting time." (Teacher A (SR)).

Last is time allocation. The time allocated for English lessons in SD/MIN was 1 hour/week, so teachers must try as much as possible to complete the material on time in 1 semester.

"...English is only taught once in 2 hours. Because I think 2 hours for 1 week is not effective for a lot of material." (Teacher A (SR))

So, the teachers explained that to finish the material on time in 1 semester, they followed the RPP where it was explained how many days each material that would be taught would take so that the material would be finished on time. In the classroom, the teacher will complete one material per meeting so that the material is completed on time according to the RPP.

Based on these findings, problems in teaching English in elementary schools emerge in many aspects. Therefore, teachers take these problems into account by finding solutions that better the quality of English language teaching in elementary schools can be achieved.

The first solution is teaching methods that can make students enjoy learning English, such as roleplay, and memorized vocabulary.

"...I sometimes apply roleplay too, but not always..." (Teacher A (SR))

"... I give you memorized vocabulary. After school, I will ask you about the vocabulary learned in class face to face." (Teacher C (SF)).

The second solution is teacher-built interaction with students by voicing "yel-yel" such as when teachers shout "hello" and students answer "hi".

"...I usually ask questions to divert students' attention from the questions. I can attract their interest and interest in liking English, at least so that they enjoy English first." (Teacher A (SR))

"...because at the beginning of the meeting we made an agreement that in Ms. Santri's class we were not allowed to do this or that, so that if anyone violated it, they would be punished." (Teacher C (SF))

The third solution is to use alternative methods. The teachers involved in this study vary significantly in age, with both younger and senior teachers. As previously mentioned, the age factor made it challenging for senior teachers to use technology, leading them to avoid it in their English teaching. To compensate for this, they employ other methods such as lectures and discussions. Similarly, the two younger teachers also rarely use technology due to insufficient teaching media, opting instead for methods such as role-playing to keep students engaged and prevent boredom.

"...In some classes there are infocus/projectors. As for English lessons themselves, I have never used a projector to teach English."

The fourth solution is the use of free time because there is no fixed syllabus in the 2013 curriculum.

"...usually retype or adopt from the books we use because they are usually teachers' books." (Teacher A (SR))

"... usually, I look at the syllabus in the book that is used, maybe I adopted it instead of making it myself." (Teacher B (BN))

"...I use the old syllabus at this school, because I'm a new teacher here so I continue the syllabus for the previous English teacher" (Teacher C (SF))

The teachers also use their free time to rest when changing classes, sometimes they use their free time to make teaching administration such as the syllabus. As stated in the following interview excerpt.

"...I use my free time before teaching the class and I will use that time attentively..." (Teacher A (SR)).

The last solution is to maximize the material according to the Lesson Plan. Allocation of little teaching time is a problem faced by English teachers because English is only local content. They must either maximize their time or explain the material succinctly, focusing on key points to avoid spending excessive time on a single topic.

"...I explain the material in as much detail as possible during the meeting ..." (Teacher A (SR)).

"...we already have a RPP, so in the RPP it has been explained in 1 meeting how much material needs to be discussed, so we follow it in the RPP." (Teacher C (SF)).

Below is the result of observations done by the researchers. Based on classroom observations, the researchers observed the teaching and learning activities in the classroom three times. First, the difficulty of textbook material teachers face difficulty attracting students when explaining the material. Then, in the classroom when teachers manage the class, it can be seen that the students are noisy, such as female students telling stories with their friends and male students walking here and there in class. Next, the teachers never use technology in class such as speakers, laptops, and projectors. In addition, the teacher always teaches 1 day 1 material to achieve learning targets in a small amount of time.

This section discusses the research findings, addressing two research questions. The focus is on the role of English as a local content subject in primary schools. The first question explores the challenges faced by English teachers in these schools, while the second question examines how these teachers address and resolve these challenges.

Based on the first question, What challenges do English teachers face when teaching English as a local content subject? A questionnaire and interviews were used in this study. The questionnaire results indicated that primary school children found the textbooks challenging and dull. Limited infrastructure and technologically illiterate teachers contributed to insufficient technology use in schools. These findings are consistent with Panezai and Channa (2017), who reported that English teachers face challenges like a lack of teaching resources and training in modern teaching aids. The main difficulties for English teachers included the difficulty level of materials, classroom management, technology usage, teaching administration, workload, and limited time allocation. Teachers identified factors such as insufficient vocabulary and pronunciation challenges due to English being a foreign language. Utomo et al. (2020) highlighted the difficulty teachers faced in creating engaging content due to the extensive academic demands. Wahyuningsih and Afandi (2020) noted that students struggled with vocabulary and pronunciation. Teachers also faced challenges in managing classroom dynamics, particularly with overly energetic

or passive students. The findings align with Vibulphol's (2016) research, which found that a lack of student motivation often led to passive and unmotivated behavior, suggesting that teachers need to implement various motivational strategies.

Teachers were limited in their use of technology due to a shortage of equipment like projectors, laptops, and speakers. Inadequate technical resources in public primary schools meant that available facilities had to be shared among teachers, resulting in infrequent use of technology in English lessons. Older teachers often avoided using technology due to unfamiliarity. Febiana (2018) identified the lack of infrastructure, such as LCD projectors and sound systems, as a major obstacle. Gull et al. (2020) highlighted the challenge of insufficient guidance on integrating ICT in classrooms, compounded by teachers' lack of proficiency.

English teachers also struggled with the absence of a defined syllabus in the 2013 curriculum, often having to create their own materials. Kaltsum and Habibiy (2020) noted that the lack of a standardized syllabus forced teachers to develop their own teaching materials. Additionally, teachers faced heavy workloads. One English teacher had to prepare materials for grades 2 to 6, covering four classes, while also handling extra tasks assigned by education boards and principals (Utomo et al., 2020). Time constraints were another issue, with teachers struggling to cover extensive English content in just one hour per week, as noted by Abrar (2020).

Observation data revealed common issues in the learning process, classroom management, and assessment. Students often struggled with comprehension, requiring extra effort from teachers. Overcrowded and noisy classrooms further hindered effective teaching. Teachers relied solely on textbooks and the lecture method without using technology. A very large number of teachers have used or implemented this technology. But, the bad thing is, the majority of teachers still teach in the traditional way. These challenges impacted student behavior and engagement, particularly among male students who were more dominant in the classroom.

The second question is how do English teachers address the challenges of teaching English as a local content subject?

Interviews and observations were used in this study. The interviews revealed several strategies that teachers employ to address challenges in teaching English as a local content subject in primary schools. First, to attract students' attention, the teachers explained material in two languages and provided memorization instructions. Widodo and Dewi (2018) support the use of daily vocabulary lists to aid students with limited understanding. Second, the teachers used provoking questions, rules, punishments, and chants to manage the classroom and engage students. Widodo and Dewi (2018) also suggest using rewards and punishments, like "punishment necklaces," to maintain discipline. Harmer (2010) emphasizes the importance of interactive and sensory learning

experiences. Third, technology use was minimal due to inadequate resources and lack of technical skills. Instead, teachers opted for effective non-technological methods, and younger teachers sometimes used personal speakers for listening lessons. Pratama et al. (2024) found that incorporating games made English lessons more engaging.

Fourth, due to the absence of a specific English syllabus, teachers created their own from available books. Rahmanda and Marhama (2022) noted that each school's syllabus varied based on different sources. Fifth, teachers with heavy workloads used free periods to prepare materials. Sixth, to manage limited time, they followed detailed lesson plans and explained material thoroughly. Damayanti (2016) highlighted the challenges of limited class time, large class sizes, and low student motivation, which teachers tried to address by conveying information as comprehensively as possible. Observations classified data based on the learning process, classroom management, and assessment. Teachers used questioning strategies to gain students' attention, as noted by Sujariati et al. (2016). They trained students in spelling and pronunciation through memorization, aligning with Bakri (2022). Reprimands were used to maintain order, consistent with findings by Alber and Heward (2000) and Hester et al. (2009). Chants and jargon helped refocus students, as suggested by Mejzin (2016). Lastly, teachers often used a mix of the mother tongue and Indonesian with English, which Khati (2011) and Nilsson (2013) found to be effective in enhancing comprehension and behavior management.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This research has detailed the challenges faced by English teachers at SDN 50 Prabumulih and MIN 1 Prabumulih. The author identified several issues encountered by primary school English teachers who are still using the 2013 curriculum and examined their solutions. The questionnaire results highlighted several notable findings: the textbooks used in primary schools are too difficult and very boring for students, technology use in these schools is inadequate, and some teachers lack technological literacy. Furthermore, interviews and observation revealed additional challenges such as the difficulty of the material, classroom management, technology usage, teaching administration, job load, and limited time allocation. This research implies that EFL teachers need strategies to overcome all the problems faced when teaching English in public elementary schools. Meanwhile, the government must balance the allocation of time for learning English at SDN/MIN and the material to be studied to make it easier for teachers to teach optimally. Future researchers will further explore the factors that become problems in teaching English in SDN/MIN to expand the scope of research

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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