

THE CHALLENGES IN USING *BELA BARIS*' APPLICATION IN ELT FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract

Young learners exhibit distinct characteristics that distinguish them from adult learners. Therefore, teachers need innovative methods to accommodate the unique characteristics of young learners when teaching them English. The *BELA BARIS* application serves as one of the innovations in English Language Teaching (ELT) for young learners. However, there are some challenges that teachers face in implementing the application. This study aims to explain the difficulties encountered when using the *BELA BARIS* application in ELT with young learners. This study employs a single instrumental case study within a descriptive qualitative research design. The participants in this study are an English teacher and fifth-grade students at SDIT Sahabat in Karanganyar Regency. The data were obtained from observations and interviews of both students and teacher. This study found that there are four challenges associated with using digital applications for teaching English to young learners: 1) poor internet connection, 2) insufficient digital literacy skills among students, 3) significant time required for preparation, and 4) limited availability of devices. The use of the *BELA BARIS* application presents an opportunity for effective English learning for young learners, but it also poses challenges that teachers face. The researcher suggests that primary school teachers incorporate it into their teaching methods.

Keywords: Bela Baris, digital application, challenges, young learners, ELT

INTRODUCTION

While English is a crucial subject in Indonesian primary education, teaching this language to young learners, especially during their formative years, presents both challenges and opportunities. David Nunan (2007) defines young learners as children in preschool or the early phases of formal education. The intricacies of language acquisition at this stage must not be overlooked. Cameron (2001) emphasizes that young learners, encompassing both children and adolescents, are in a pivotal phase of cognitive and social development, necessitating that the pedagogical methods

and materials used for teaching English be age-appropriate and culturally relevant. A crucial factor is that young learners often have limited attention spans, rendering conventional language acquisition techniques potentially less effective. Furthermore, the incorporation of a foreign language like English may necessitate specialized pedagogical strategies that cater to the developmental requirements of children, thereby ensuring an engaging and practical learning experience. Therefore, although the intention to implement English instruction at an early age is praiseworthy, meticulous consideration must be afforded to the

curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, and evaluation techniques to ensure this initiative is advantageous for young learners in Indonesia.

According to Harmer (2007), young learners are children between the ages of 5 and 12, with a focus on addressing their specific learning needs. At this age, children are greatly influenced by their curiosity, emotional involvement in the learning process, and the need for interactive, hands-on activities. Language learning for young learners should be both enjoyable and meaningful, ensuring that they remain engaged and motivated throughout the process. Meanwhile, Tudor (2001) explained young learners as "curious, emotionally engaged, and highly social," which highlights the importance of fostering a supportive, interactive, and motivating classroom environment. He advocated for the use of interactive tasks that cater to their need for social interaction and exploration.

Scott (2003) stated the general characteristics of young learners whose eight to ten years old are 1) they ask question all the time, 2) they can make some decision to their learning, 3) they have definite views about what they like and what they do not like, 4) they can work with others and can learn from others, 5) they begin to question about the teacher's decision. Therefore, as an English teacher for young learners, one must adapt the use of methods or media in the teaching and learning process to these characteristics. One of the methods that teachers can use is game-based learning, where they utilize game applications as a learning medium.

BELA BARIS' application is one of the innovative game applications used by teachers at SDIT SAHABAT, Karanganyar Regency, to accommodate the unique characteristics of young learners, which incorporates games. *BELA BARIS'* application was created as a learning medium

in ELT, focusing on Comparison materials. This application was accessed by fifth-grade students online.

Scott (2003) explained about what we have focus in teaching English to young learners, namely 1) words are not enough, teachers must use plenty of objects and pictures as learning media and also demonstrate what the teachers want them to do, 2) play with the language means teachers make up rhymes, sing song, and tell story, 3) language as language, reading and writing are extremely important for child's growing awareness of language, 4) variety in the classroom, they have very short concentration and attention so teachers need to be variety of face, variety of voice, variety of pace, and variety of organization, 5) Routines, children benefits for knowing the rules and become familiar with the situation, 6) cooperation not competition, teachers must avoid rewards and prizes, 7) children can absorb foreign language when they are enjoyable with the activity.

Young learners have different characteristics from adult learners (Harmer, 2007). According to Scott (2004), young learners (typically ages 5-12) are enthusiastic about learning when it is fun and engaging, and they learn best when they are enjoying themselves. Young learners have a short attention span (Tamis-LeMonda, 1990), but they are adept at imitating and possess a high capacity for language development (Bloom, 1974). To accommodate the students' enthusiasm, teachers need to design fun learning in the classroom. Additionally, young learners can express their preferences (Scott, 1998). So, English teachers needed to design enjoyable learning in ELT to accommodate students' enthusiasm through digital applications. ELT provides fun activities for young learners, such as singing/listening to songs, watching videos, playing games, telling and listening to stories, engaging in conversation activities,

taking learning trips/outdoor activities, drawing, using pictures, and playing flashcards (Purnami, 2022). It aligns with Fenyvesi (2020), who found that children enjoy real-life situations, differentiated learning, and variation in learning English.

Having a short attention span is another characteristic of young learners. It aligns with Tamis-LeMonda (1990), who stated that children focus on objects or related objects for prolonged periods. One solution that teachers in ELT use is to use games. It aligns with Bakhsh (2016), who found that games are an effective method to teach children. Norena (2020) also stated that games are a fun way for children to learn in the classroom. It also aligns with Redlarska, J. (2020), who found that games are fun activities for children.

The unique characteristics of young learners include being good at imitating (Speidel, 2012; Bloom, 1974; Nelson, 1973; Vinther, 2002) and having a high capacity for language development (Bloom, 1974; Pinter, 2017; Linebarger, 2010), which can become challenging for some teachers in ELT. It aligns with Sınıflarda (2004), which states that young learners are a challenging task in ELT.

Innovation in teaching English to young learners can cater to the unique personalities of these learners. Some innovations have been developed for young learners in ELT, including games (Hazar, 2020), songs, and stories (Chou, 2014; Asmali, 2017; Norena, 2020). Other researcher have found that students enjoy using Multimedia (Kaydet, 2019).

The strength of using games is that teachers can directly focus on their students' learning goals. Meanwhile, one weakness of using games is that students become dependent on the game and spend a considerable amount of time playing it. Teachers face several challenges when using digital technology in ELT. It aligned with

Saputra (2021) found there are four challenges of the use games as digital technology on ELT, namely 1) the instructor places less emphasis on the interests of the students, 2) restrictions in describing the information and content, 3) students only act in a competitive, non-cooperative manner, 4) inadequate game support, facilities, and technology.

Besides that, Purmayanti (2022) also identified three challenges in implementing digital tools, namely children's lack of digital literacy skills, teachers' lack of digital literacy skills, and a lack of supportive access to and digital resources. Meanwhile, Tirén (2021) found that teachers faced several obstacles to using digital games in English class, including a lack of time for preparation, insufficient knowledge to use or create digital games, and difficulty in finding quality games. The similarity between this study and previous studies lies in the investigation of the challenges associated with the use of digital applications in ELT.

On the other hand, the strength of using songs is that children can easily remember the learning materials, become deeply involved (Norena, 2020), have fun during the learning process, and most children love it (Paul, 2007). The weakness of using songs is that they may not always align with curriculum standards or may contain unsuitable vocabulary or grammar. Additionally, music can be distracting, and some students may struggle to study effectively with it playing in the background. Sound system issues and varying student preferences can also present challenges.

The strength of using stories is that children can practice their listening skills and focus on the details of the teaching materials (Cameron, as cited in Norena, 2020). Meanwhile, the weakness of using stories is that it takes much time, especially if the story is too long.

The strength of multimedia is that it serves as an effective tool for self-learning and self-assessment in children, motivating students' competence (Ogay, 2020). The weakness of multimedia is the limitation of devices at school. Therefore, the researchers conclude that the use of learning media can effectively improve children's motivation and competence in ELT.

Other innovations have found that the use of digital applications is effective in teaching English to young learners. It aligns with Sari (2022), who found that the use of digital tools in ELT for kids is effective. It also aligns with Lestariyana (2018), who utilized digital storytelling to enhance student engagement. The strength of using digital applications lies in their ability to enhance all skills of children, improve collaboration, and increase the use of technology (Mudra, 2020). Meanwhile, the weaknesses of digital applications are related to internet signals (Mudra, 2020), high costs (Kalkayeva, 2019; Fitria, 2023), the inappropriateness of some digital applications for learning goals, and the lack of user interaction with text (Chik, 2014). The researchers concluded that the use of digital applications in ELT can serve as an alternative solution for learning media in ELT. However, some weaknesses have been identified.

BELA BARIS' application is one of the innovative digital applications that fills the gap. The teacher creates *BELA BARIS'* application based on learning goals in ELT for primary school students. This application offers solutions to make learning enjoyable for kids at a low cost, while aligning with teachers' learning goals.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a single instrumental case study within a descriptive qualitative research design. Creswell (2012) stated that a single instrumental case study is one type of case study, which uses a single

case to provide an in-depth examination of a problem. The researcher identified one case, specifically the challenges of *BELA BARIS'* application in ELT to young learners, which occurred in a primary school class. The research was conducted at SDIT Sahabat in Karanganyar Regency. The participants included an English teacher and twenty fifth-grade students. Data was gathered via comprehensive interviews and observations. Semi-structured interviews were performed with an English teacher and twenty students. The interviews, which lasted approximately ten minutes each, were conducted. Observation was conducted three times during the *BELA BARIS'* learning sessions. The researchers employed an observation checklist and field notes to document students.

This study was conducted by ethical standards, safeguarding the welfare and rights of all participants. All participants provided informed consent prior to participating in the study. The collected data was handled with rigorous confidentiality and anonymity. Potential risks associated with participation were mitigated, and the benefits of the research were thoroughly evaluated. The research protocol received approval from the headmaster of SDIT SAHABAT.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The application of *BELA BARIS'* was conducted in three sessions with twenty-five-grade students. Students used Chromebooks to access the website version of *BELA BARIS'* application. Three students used one Chromebook to learn Comparison materials. The students learned the materials, watched the learning video, and practised completing the assignments through the "game" feature on the *BELA BARIS'* application. The research found some challenges that were faced in using *BELA BARIS'* application on ELT for children as follows:

Internet Connectivity Challenges

The applications are being integrated into the classroom. The challenge of unreliable internet access, highlighted by this study, is well-supported in the literature. For example, Syahdan (2023), Aljuaid (2021), and Hockly (2018) all identify poor internet connectivity as a barrier to accessing digital learning tools. The study's findings align with these perspectives, underscoring how the unstable Wi-Fi connection disrupted the students' engagement with the *BELA BARIS* application.

However, a critical reflection on this issue invites us to consider the root causes of these connectivity problems. While the poor Wi-Fi network within the school was a significant impediment, some scholars suggest that broader systemic issues—such as the uneven distribution of resources in educational settings—play a critical role. For instance, Ally (2014) and Santos et al. (2018) note that unreliable networks and outdated devices are not just localized problems but reflect a more pervasive issue within many educational institutions, particularly in areas where funding for digital infrastructure is limited. This issue, then, is not only about the school's inability to maintain stable internet connectivity, but it also points to global educational inequalities, where access to technological resources can vary significantly between regions.

Moreover, Ellis (2019) and Godwin-Jones (2018) note that poor internet access not only limits access to digital resources but also degrades the quality of learning experiences, leading to disengagement, frustration, and decreased academic performance. In the context of this study, the delays and disconnections could have undermined the educational experience by causing frustration among students, resulting in disengagement from the lesson.

However, a key point in the study's findings is the adaptation to these

connectivity challenges, such as using mobile devices or tethering from smartphones. This is a pragmatic approach to overcoming connectivity issues. However, it raises questions about equity—if some students are unable to bring mobile devices or lack access to reliable data plans, it may exacerbate the digital divide (Van Der Meijden, 2021). A further solution suggested in the study, transitioning from the online website version to a mobile app version, reflects a growing recognition that flexibility in accessing digital tools is necessary to accommodate varying resources and contexts.

Lack of Digital Literacy Skills

The second significant challenge encountered in this study was the students' lack of digital literacy skills. The teacher needs to guide students through the application, explaining basic functions and highlighting the broader issue of inadequate digital literacy training, especially among younger students or those with limited exposure to technology. This challenge, as noted by Mudra (2020), Purmayanti (2022), and Murtadho (2023), is not unique to this study but is part of a larger trend. As digital tools become more integrated into classrooms, digital literacy skills must be cultivated early on to ensure students can effectively engage with these tools.

However, while the study identifies this challenge, a critical perspective would question whether the responsibility for digital literacy lies solely with the individual teachers. In many cases, students are expected to develop digital literacy skills without formal training in how to use technology effectively for educational purposes. According to Sezer (2017) and Jin (2014), students' lack of familiarity with technology is exacerbated by the absence of structured, curriculum-based training on digital literacy. This suggests that a more systematic approach, including

comprehensive teacher training and institutional support, is necessary to ensure that both students and teachers are equipped to use technology effectively. The study's solution of written learning sequences and ongoing guidance is a valuable short-term strategy. However, there may also be long-term benefits to integrating digital literacy instruction into the curriculum itself, rather than as an afterthought.

Time-Consuming Preparations and Technical Issues

The time-consuming preparations involved in using the *BELA BARIS* application, as highlighted in the study, reflect another significant challenge. Teachers' time spent troubleshooting devices, ensuring compatibility, and addressing connection issues can be seen as both a practical and psychological burden. This issue is echoed in the works of Sotillo (2019), Fitria (2023), and Saud (2024), who discuss the time constraints teachers face when incorporating technology into their lessons. These challenges often lead to burnout (Jones, 2020) or resistance to using digital tools (Ertmer, 1999), which can have a detrimental effect on the implementation of technology in classrooms.

Interestingly, while these challenges were reported in the study, the teachers' proactive approach—using backup internet sources and relying on projectors—highlights the adaptability and creativity of educators in overcoming technical issues. Still, it raises important questions about the broader educational infrastructure. Are teachers given enough time, resources, and support to integrate technology effectively? Williams (2020) points out that without sufficient preparation time and technical support, the integration of technology into classrooms will continue to be hindered by logistical and technical barriers. This highlights the need for schools and educational systems to offer

more comprehensive support for teachers, encompassing not only technology but also ongoing professional development and access to technical resources.

Limited device

last challenge to using *BELA BARIS* application as a learning medium was the limited devices. The school had fifteen Chromebooks, but only used seven for stable internet connections. This aligns with Aljuaid (2021), who found that students lacked access to computers. It also aligns with Taghizadeh (2020), who found that there were limited computer facilities for using technology in the classroom for teaching and learning purposes. Tamin (2015) stated that limited devices can affect how teachers use technology in ELT, which often reduces the overall effectiveness of digital applications. It also aligns with Purmayanti (2022), who found that a lack of support for access to and digital equipment was one of the challenges in integrating digital applications into English classes. It also aligns with Fitria (2023), who states that limited access to the application became a challenge.

The students took turns using Chromebooks. The teacher ensured that all students had the same opportunities to use Chromebooks and play *BELA BARIS* application. This finding aligns with Hubbard (2006), who found that teachers had to spend more time coordinating device usage and ensuring all students had an opportunity to interact with technology, which took time away from instructional planning.

This condition can impact students' use of digital applications as a learning medium. According to Song (2018), it creates inequality in the classroom, where only some students benefit from these resources. It aligns with Warschauer (2007), who stated that students without access to devices may feel disconnected from the learning process, leading to a decline in

motivation and interest. Meanwhile, Garrison (2004) stated that when students are not actively using the technology, they may become disengaged, or some may not have the opportunity to complete digital tasks within the given time. Selwyn (2016) stated that it creates a gap between those who can regularly access digital resources and those who cannot.

This condition reflected the need for the facility to receive support from the school or institution to provide computers, Chromebooks, or laptops in sufficient quantity and a stable internet connection. It aligns with Anderson (2018), who stated that schools and universities need to ensure reliable and accessible internet infrastructure, especially for students in rural or underserved areas.

CONCLUSION

The use of *BELA BARIS* application in the classroom for young learners in ELT is an opportunity to make learning fun by incorporating games within the application. While the *BELA BARIS* application offers a promising opportunity for effective English learning, it also introduces challenges for educators. This study identifies four key challenges in using *BELA BARIS* applications for teaching English to young learners: 1) unreliable internet connection, 2) limited digital literacy skills among students, 3) substantial preparation time, and 4) restricted access to devices. The researcher recommends that primary school teachers integrate this application into their teaching practices, despite the obstacles, to enhance learning outcomes for young learners.

The challenges identified have important implications for the way digital applications are integrated into ELT, especially for young learners. Firstly, the issue of unreliable internet connections calls attention to the need for flexible digital solutions that can work both online and

offline, such as mobile versions of applications. Secondly, the lack of digital literacy skills among students suggests that the curriculum should incorporate foundational digital skills alongside language learning. Teachers must also account for the time and resources needed to train students to use digital tools effectively. Moreover, limited access to devices points to the necessity for schools to invest in better infrastructure and ensure equitable access to technology for all students. These factors underscore the importance of preparing both students and teachers to use digital tools efficiently in the classroom to maximize learning outcomes. There are practical suggestions for teachers and schools, namely 1) integration of the mobile version: to address internet connection issues, it is recommended that teachers use the mobile version of the *BELA BARIS* application, which supports both online and offline usage. this flexibility can help overcome connectivity problems and ensure that learning continues without interruptions, 2) collaboration with parents: teachers should actively involve parents in supporting the use of digital applications by informing them of the benefits and encouraging them to allow their children to bring smartphones to school. this collaboration can help ensure that students have the necessary resources for effective learning, 3) pre-lesson training: teachers should provide an introduction and training session on how to use the *BELA BARIS* application before incorporating it into lessons. familiarizing students with the application in advance will reduce potential confusion and improve the overall learning experience, 4) digital literacy development: schools should prioritize digital literacy as part of the broader curriculum. introducing students to basic digital skills early on can help them navigate digital learning tools more effectively, reducing frustration and enhancing the learning experience, 5)

infrastructure and resources: schools must invest in adequate digital infrastructure, such as devices and stable internet connections, to ensure that students have equal access to technology. this investment is crucial for fostering a conducive environment for digital learning and ensuring that no student is left behind due to a lack of resources, 6) by addressing these challenges and taking proactive measures, educators can leverage the potential of digital applications like *BELA BARIS* to enhance language learning and engage young learners in a dynamic and interactive way.

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