## EARLY CAREER ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERFORMANCE: STORIES AND CHALLENGES IN ENHANCING STUDENTS' LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

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#### Abstract

Teachers' determination of effective teaching methods to enhance English proficiency in primary schools has become an urgent concern. English has become one of the mandatory subjects again for all primary schools, especially public primary schools, have to start from third to sixth grade. In reality, a lot of public primary school students find it challenging to gain proficiency in the language, which limits their capability to engage completely in the school. This research aims to delve into how early career English teachers navigate teaching and learning process in English class, the challenges and opportunities for early career English teachers in implementing teaching methods, and students' perception of early career English teachers' performance in enhancing students' English language proficiency. This qualitative research study employs a case study as methodology. The study used observations, interviews, and questionnaires to collect data from each early career English teachers in SDN Kupang 02, SDN Tambakboyo 02, and SDN Bandungan 03 as public primary schools in Semarang Regency. The results demonstrate that early career English teachers' teaching methods affected students' English proficiency. Using creative and interactive learning media can create an enjoyable, engagement, and conducive English class. It beneficially affected in enhancing student's English language proficiency.

Keywords: [Early Career English Teachers, Teaching Methods, Stories, Challenges, English Proficiency]

#### INTRODUCTION

Teachers' determination to use effective teaching methods to improve English language proficiency in primary school students has become an urgent concern in the field of education (Sabnani, 2023; Ibrahim et al, 2020). Since 2024, primary schools need to teach English as a mandatory subject for students in grades 3 to 6 in public primary schools required teachers to be able to teach English to primary school students and find effective teaching methods. It is according to the latest regulation of the Emancipated Curriculum, the Ministry

Education. Culture. Research. and Technology also mandates that all education units non-3T during two years in academic until vears 2024/2025 academic 2025/2026 must implement the newest curricula (Putra, 2024). English language skills among primary school students are currently a very urgent need. In an increasingly globally connected world (Rao, 2019), English not only international tool for serves as communication but also becomes an important skill that supports students' success in both academic and professional fields in the future.

Besides, Rana and Shaikh (2024) agreed that English proficiency is also linked with career growth and professional opportunities. It can impact on job success, particularly in the fields where English serves as the primary mode of communication. In this regard, several essential points are emphasized in the implementation of the **Emancipated** Curriculum, particularly at the primary school level. This phenomenon occurs widely in various regions in Indonesia, where there is a shortage of teachers with English teaching skills (Octavia et al., 2023). When the Emancipated Curriculum began implemented and encouraged schools to return to teaching English, many schools were not ready in terms of human resources.

However, many public primary schools in Indonesia don't have English teachers to teach this new subject. Also, many students in public primary schools still have difficulty acquiring this language, which is a foreign language and a new lesson for them, made worse by the lack of available resources during the curriculum transition period. It was caused by the last curriculum that deleted English as a mandatory subject in public primary schools.

Therefore, several public primary schools in Indonesia hired early career English teachers to teach English subjects. Early career English teachers are characterized as teachers who have started teaching (Mahmud, 2020). Then, they are also still be honorarium teachers and have the status of non-permanent and non-civil servants. They have a working relationship with the school based on the schools' needs (Razaqna, 2021).

A study conducted by Mesa and Mora (2023) in Colombia found that teachers at the primary level express that there is no use of English because they are frustrated, not motivated, do not have the necessary skills, and even lack knowledge for English teaching, hence the need for professional development

opportunities (Lightfoot et al., 2022; Pathak, 2023; Baisa, 2024).

On the other side, focusing on our country, Indonesia, which still struggling to hold and implement some programs to boost the English proficiency of students at schools in Indonesian, especially primary school students who reported by some data still have low levels of English proficiency (Jazuly et al., 2019; Rachmajanti et al., 2023). The existence of this phenomenon causes urgent concern about the current condition of English language teaching in primary schools, especially public primary schools.

In Ethiopia, the results of an assessment of English teachers at the elementary level also showed significant weaknesses in the implementation of CLT, which emphasized the need for intervention and further training to improve teachers' language skills and overall teaching quality (Abrar, 2023; Negewo et al., 2023; Bedilu & Degefu, 2023). By looking at comparisons from various countries, it can be concluded that the challenge in providing competent English teachers at the primary school level is a global issue.

According to Pushpalatha (2022), experiential learning focuses a strong emphasis on the necessity for students to actively participate, acquire practical experience, and engage in reflective thought to acquire knowledge, skills, and ethical habits. Teaching methods include activity procedures and all subject matter components needed to help students achieve certain learning objectives.

Thus, Freeman (1986) emphasized the most fundamental parts of language teaching, underlining the need for information in making the best decisions for teaching a foreign language using appropriate methods to help students learn. She also stated that evaluation and feedback are essential in the language learning process and are thoroughly evaluated to support successful learning. Also, Brown

(2000) claimed that making good lesson plans and preparing them adequately, as well as classroom management, are the main keys to creating a positive learning environment that contributes to enhancing students' English proficiency.

Moreover, Cahyati and Madya (2019) added that the good practices of teachers have a huge impact on language learning outcomes. Courses in English language pedagogy are theoretically grounded and, at the same time practical in nature. Mulyanah and Ishak (2020) led the English teaching courses by introducing the role of the teacher in the designing of the outcomes. These can develop and examine how classroom language is delving into shaping teacher development, hence the creation of the professional standard of the teacher.

Although most researchers agree that teachers' teaching methods are significant in implementing language learning processes, there is still a lack of the research results regarding the specific context in public primary school students and the teaching methods used by early career English teachers to enhance students' English language proficiency. Then, there are still challenges faced by early career English teachers' teaching methods in implementing teaching methods in public primary schools.

Moreover, the benefits will arise after early career English teachers can implement teaching methods in English Language Teaching. To fill the existing gap, research regarding specific early career English teachers' teaching methods that are effective in enhancing English language proficiency among primary school students is still lacking, especially in the context of experiences and challenges in public primary schools.

Hence, this study aims to delve into how three (3) early career English teachers in public primary schools in Semarang Regency navigate teaching and learning process in the English class, the challenges and opportunities for early career English teachers in implementing teaching methods in public primary schools, and students' perception of early career English teachers' performance in enhancing students' English language proficiency.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore in-depth (Creswell, 2012) the stories and challenges faced by early career English teachers in enhancing students' language proficiency in public primary schools, aiming to enhance students' English proficiency. The study was conducted in three public primary schools in Semarang Regency, those are SDN Kupang 2, SDN Tambakboyo 02, and SDN Bandungan 03.

The participants consisted of three early career English teachers, who are casually employed by the schools, each representing one of the selected schools. Data were obtained through three main instruments: classroom observation, student questionnaires, and interviews with early career English teachers. These instruments were used to collect comprehensive information about the teaching methods implemented by three (3) early career English teachers, students' responses, and overall classroom dynamics.

The data collection procedure involved observing teaching sessions, distributing questionnaires to students, and conducting interviews with early career English teachers. The collected data were then organized, analyzed, and interpreted to conclude the early career English teachers' performance in enhancing students' English language proficiency in public primary schools.

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### Finding

### Early Career English Teachers Navigated Teaching and Learning Process in English Class

The results of the study indicated that the early career English teachers in public primary schools apply various effective teaching methods to improve students' English skills. These approaches include delivering materials in a structured manner, using interesting media, and learning strategies that focus on student participation.

# Teaching Methods as Strategies to Enhance Students' English Proficiency

Research findings indicated that early career English teachers at SDN Kupang 02, SDN Tambakboyo 02, and SDN Bandungan 03 applied various teaching methods as strategies to enhance students' English language proficiency adapted the characteristics of their students and classroom conditions. At SDN Kupang 02, teachers used game-based learning methods and group activities that encourage active interaction, picture matching, such sentence construction practice, and guessing games (Teachers' interview, 2025). This method was effective in building students' motivation and confidence in speaking English.

Meanwhile, at SDN Tambakboyo 02, the early career English teacher applied a lecture method combined with visual aids such as pictures and worksheets. This strategy helped students understand basic vocabulary in context, even though the classroom environment was more passive than at other schools. At SDN Bandungan 03, the early career English teacher showed creativity by using digital media such as pictures and videos from YouTube as well as educational songs with physical movements (Classroom observation, 2025). This teaching method was effective for students who have kinesthetic and audiovisual learning styles and increased engagement through fun activities that combine music, movement, and real-life contexts.

# Ensuring Alignment with Curriculum and Learning Objectives

The early career English teachers at SDN Kupang 02, SDN Tambakboyo 02, and SDN Bandungan 03 have generally shown commitment to aligning their teaching process with the Emancipated Curriculum. They develop teaching modules based on the applicable curriculum structure, which include opening, main, closing, assessment activities (Teachers' interview, 2025). However, in practice, they also demonstrated flexibility by adapting materials based on students' abilities and needs.

At SDN Kupang 02, the early career English teacher not only used LKPD but also independently created more engaging and contextual worksheets to make learning more interesting. At SDN Tambakboyo 02, the early career English teacher simplify the material from textbooks so that it could be more easily understood by his students who were new to English. Also, the early career English teacher at SDN Bandungan 03 designed further modules in coordination with the KKG forum, but still adjust the content to the characteristics of the students in the field (Teachers' interview, 2025).

All three early career English teacher effective curriculum realized that implementation required deep a understanding of the real conditions of their students in the English class. By adapting the material, creating enjoyable learning media, and paying attention to the students' characteristics, they strive to bridge the gap between the demands of the curriculum and the reality of learning, so that the goal of improving students' English proficiency can be achieved more optimally.

### Fostering an Engaging and Conducive Learning Environment

The early career English teachers at the three schools as participants strived to create an conducive interactive, enjoyable, and learning atmosphere that suited the students' needs. In all schools, the early career English teachers began lessons with relevant opening activities, such as greeting, triggered questions, and religious routines at SDN Bandungan 03 to build initial comfort among students (Teachers' interview, 2025). The early career English teachers at SDN Kupang 02 dan SDN Tambakboyo 02 related the material to their students' daily lives, such as the topic "things at home", to make the lesson more easily understood.

All early career English teachers also used visual aids and contextual worksheets to keep students engaged, and integrated fun games or ice breakers to maintain learning enthusiasm. Personal relationships with students are also built through communicative approach, encouraging students to feel more confident in learning English. These practices demonstrated that the early career English teachers successfully create a positive learning environment and support the early development of students' English language proficiency.

# Assessment and Feedback for Supporting Student Learning and Progress

At the three public primary schools, the early career English teachers demonstrated a good understanding of the importance of assessment and feedback as part of the learning process. At SDN Kupang 02, the early career English teacher implemented a flexible assessment approach that focused on student understanding rather than simply achieving curriculum targets. She often used worksheets as assessment tools that were linked to class discussions. Feedback is given individually both verbally and directly when visiting students one by one, to explain

mistakes and reinforce understanding. This teaching method was considered effective because it was more responsive to students' needs than mass explanations, although it took longer. In practice, assessment focuses on writing skills due to limited facilities for listening and speaking assessment (Teachers' interview, 2025).

Meanwhile, at SDN Tambakboyo 02, assessments were conducted in formative and summative forms. The main focus of assessment is on students' writing skills, given the limited time and large number of students. The early career English teacher in SDN Tambakboyo 02 assessed spelling accuracy, answer appropriateness, common mistakes in vocabulary usage. Feedback was provided both verbally during the lesson and in writing on students' worksheets. He noted that although some students corrected their mistakes, others did not show significant progress due to a lack of support at home.

At SDN Bandungan assessment approach used was formative and contextual. The early career English teacher in SDN Bandungan 03 gave written and speaking assignments that emphasized writing and pronunciation skills. Feedback was given directly and personally by calling students one by one to the front of the class to mistakes provide tell and additional explanations. In addition, she used short quizzes to evaluate understanding and give verbal appreciation to increase students' motivation.

## The Challenges and Opportunities for Early Career English Teachers to Implement Teaching Methods

# Challenges in Implementing Teaching Methods

The three early career English teachers faced various challenges in implementing teaching methods. At SDN Kupang 02, the early career English teacher encountered students'

boredom due to monotonous text-book based learning. She overcame this by using visual methods and interactive games to maintain student enthusiasm for learning English. Pronounciation challenges also often arose, mainly due to differences between spelling and pronunciation. She simplified her teaching by breaking down complex words and providing concrete examples, making it easier for students to understand (Teachers' interview, 2025). Although this teaching method slowed down the delivery of material, she prioritized students' understanding.

Then, at SDN Tambakboyo 02, the main challenges in managing a dynamic classroom and limited learning time to teach English language. The early career English teacher in SDN Tambakboyo 02 must balance the pace of teaching because most students have never studied English before, so their proficiency levels vary greatly. Time constraints make it difficult to explore all four language skills optimally, especially speaking and listening.

Meanwhile, at SDN Bandungan 03, the challenges are more complex due to low student motivation and a lack of supporting facilities. The early career English teacher in SDN Bandungan 03 faced a gap between teaching theory in college and the reality of heterogeneous classrooms. Limited time, resources, and students who are not ready to learn mean that she often has to adjust their teaching methods and materials to remain relevant and meaningful. Implementing differentiated instructions is also difficult to do consistently due to the large number of students with highly diverse characteristics and abilities.

## Overcoming Challenges through Innovative Teaching Strategies

English teachers in SDN Kupang 02, SDN Tambakboyo 02, and SDN Bandungan 03 at the beginning of their careers daced various challenges in teaching, ranging from low

students' motivation, limited learning time, to varying levels of students' proficiency within a single class. However, these challenges did not prevent them from continuing to deliver effective learning. All three early career English teachers showed high adaptability by implementing innovative strategies that supported active student engagement. For example, the teacher at SDN Kupang 02 used visual approaches and simple teaching aids such as markers, clocks, and pencil boxes, to explain prepositions concretely. She also avoided teaching that was too focused on workbooks by designing further worksheets that were more engaging and easily understood.

Meanwhile, the early career English teacher at SDN Tambakboyo 02 modified the material to be more contextual and enjoyable by creating games such as crossword puzzles and making pop-up books from worksheets to increase student participation. He also applied a personal approach, such as discussing during break time to build closeness and trust with students. On the other hand, early career English teacher in SDN Bandungan 03 integrated technology and multimedia, such as videos from YouTube and LCDs, and combined them with ice-breaking and physical games to keep the classroom environment in the English class lively. They also showed improvisation in developing materials by adjusting teaching content based on students' actual needs. These teaching methods proved that creativity, empathy, and openness to change were the main keys to overcoming obstacles in the learning English language.

### Opportunities for Adapting Teaching Methods to Student Needs

The Students' Perception of Early Career English Teachers in Implementation Teaching Methods

In general, students have a very positive perception of the teaching methods applied by early career English teachers in SDN Kupang 02, SDN Tambakboyo 02, and SDN Bandungan 03. They strongly agree that teachers respect and are responsive to their needs (Questionnaire result, 2024) and provide space for them to learn actively and comfortably.

### Clarity and Structure in Delivering Material

Most students stated that their early career English teachers explained the material clearly and systematically. Questionnaire data showed high scores of very agree from students in three schools. In addition, students stated that they very agree found it easier to understand assignments and exams after the teaching strategies were implemented (Questionnaire results, 2024). The early career English teachers explained in interviews that they structured the materials by adjusting to students' abilities and inserting step-by-step explanations.

### Use of Interactive and Creative Media

Learning media, such as pictures, songs, and LCD projectors, were used to enhance the appeal of learning. Students' responses to the use of these media were positive, with very strong agreement from SDN Kupang 2 and SDN Tambakboyo 2, and agreement from SDN Bandungan 3. They also admitted that they enjoyed the learning activities because they agreed that more interesting and enjoyable (Questionnaire results, 2024). The early career English teachers stated that visual and audio media helped activate passive students and made the learning process less boring (Teachers' interview, 2025).

### Effectiveness of Teaching Strategies

The teaching methods implemented by the early career english teachers in SDN Kuoang 02, SDN Tambakboyo 02, and SDN Bandungan 03 have been shown to contribute

to improving students' English language proficiency. Students stated very agree that early career English teachers' teaching methods helped them learn better, and agree that it increased their confidence in speaking and writing in English (Questionnaire results, 2024). Moreover, early career English teachers stated that providing space for students to express themselves in English, both in speaking and writing, was key to their development.

## Creating a Conducive Learning Environment

The students very agree that early career English teachers struggled to create a comfortable, enjoyable classroom environment that encouraged students to be active (Questionnaire results, 2024). The early career English teachers said that a positive learning environment can enhance students' motivation and comfort, so that they are more confident when learning English (Teachers' interview, 2025).

# Student Involvement Through Opportunities for Participation

Early career English teachers provide as many opportunities as possible for students to be involved in learning. Students from SDN Kupang 02 and SDN Bandungan 03 were very agree, and SDN Tambakboyo 02 was agree that activities such as vocabulary games, group discussions, and speaking practice are a means of encouraging active student participation (Questionnaire results, 2024).

## Behavior Management in the Target Language

Early career English teachers also implement classroom management by using English directly, so that students are accustomed to hearing and using the language in real contexts (Questionnaire results, 2024). This received a positive response from students

SDN Kupang 02 and SDN Bandungan 03 were very agree, then SDN Tambakboyo 02 was agree. In interviews, early career English teachers said that they had tried using English in giving instructions, which also has an impact on students' habits of using the language in classroom interactions (Teacher's interview, 2025).

#### Student Motivation as a Dual Factor

Student motivation can be a challenge, but also an opportunity. Although some students from SDN Kupang 02 strongly agree, SDN Tambakboyo 02 and SDN Bandungan 03 agree that if they feel English is difficult to learn, they still show enthusiasm for learning (Questionnaire results, 2024). Moreover, early career English teachers stated that by providing reinforcement and creating a pleasant environment in the English classroom, students become more motivated to continue learning (Teacher's interview, 2025).

### Opportunities through Interactive Methods

Interactive methods open up opportunities for early career English teachers to increase student engagement and make the learning process more effective (Teacher's interview, 2025). Media such as songs, pictures, and videos are considered effective in reducing boredom and increasing student focus. The teacher said that through this method, students who were initially passive became more courageous in trying to speak English.

## The Need for a Supportive Feedback System

Feedback is an important part of an effective learning process. Students strongly agree that they are helped when early career English teachers answer questions patiently and provide direct guidance (Questionnaire results, 2024). early career English teachers also provide corrections and suggestions for students' writing and speaking skills. The early career English teachers said that they

used oral and written feedback regularly, so that students understand their mistakes and know how to fix them (Teacher's interview, 2025)

In addition, early career English teachers have also been shown to be able to enhance students' speaking and writing skills, as reflected in significant improvements in pre-test and post-test results:

Table 1. The percentage increase of the English test

School	Percentage Increase
SDN Kupang 2	94,7%
SDN Tambakboyo2	79.3%
SDN Bandungan 3	85.7%

This increase shows that the teaching methods applied are not only liked by students, but also have a real impact on their acquiring of English language proficiency. This is proof that the role of early career English teachers is very strategic in helping public primary school students to develop English language competency.

#### **Discussion**

The study's results showed that early career English teachers in public primary schools implemented various teaching methods to enhance their students' English language proficiency. Structured delivery of materials and the use of interesting learning media have been shown to help meet the diverse learning needs of students. This is in line with Freeman's (1986) view that effective language teaching requires careful planning and selection of appropriate methods. The use of learning media such as visual aids, songs, and digital media has been proven to make learning more enjoyable and easier to understand, especially for public primary school students who are new to English. This strategy also reflects Brown's (2000) opinion that good classroom planning and management play a very important role in supporting successful language learning.

Furthermore, early career English teachers demonstrate efforts in creating a positive and inclusive learning environment. This also suit with Pushpalatha's (2022) view regarding experiential learning, which emphasizes active student participation, direct experience, and reflection as the key to developing language proficiency. Data show that early career English teachers used a variety of teaching methods to engage students in learning activities, such as vocabulary games, group discussions, and speaking exercises, which increase student active engagement. Those methods are a booster of active participation in experiential learning. Classroom management strategies, such as using English in daily instruction, can help students become familiar with English language and enhance their proficiency, especially in listening and speaking skills.

Based on findings showed that early career English teachers face challenges and opportunities when implementing teaching methods. One of the main challenges is low student motivation, which can be caused by a lack of previous experience in learning English and the perception that English is a difficult subject. However, this actually provides opportunities for early career English teachers to innovate through various interactive methods, such as the use of songs, images, and videos. These methods have been shown to be effective in reducing boredom and increasing student focus, even in students who were initially passive. These findings support the opinion of Cahyati and Madya (2019) that good teacher practices greatly influence language learning outcomes. In addition, having a good feedback system is also an important opportunity. Providing oral written feedback helps students understand their mistakes and improve their performance, which encourages independent and continuous learning.

In additional, the midst of the condition of the English language proficiency of primary school students in Indonesia which is still relatively low (Jazuly et al., 2019; Rachmajanti et al., 2023), students' positive perceptions of the teaching methods of early career English teachers are an important indicator. Students felt that the learning methods used by early career English teachers are interesting, make it easier for them to understand the lessons, and increase their confidence in speaking and writing. The increase in learning outcomes implementing the method shows that early career English teachers are able to bridge the ability gap with a communicative and participatory approach in the English classroom. This is in line with Pushpalatha (2022) on the importance of active learning experiences, and Freeman (1986) who emphasizes that feedback and the right approach are very important in teaching a foreign language. By creating interactive and creative classes as a space for students to express themselves, early career English teachers in primary schools play a strategic role in responding to the challenge of low English language proficiency of students in primary schools, especially public supporting the implementation of the Emancipated Curriculum in Indonesia.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The conclusions of this study revealed that early career English teachers in public primary schools were able to develop teaching methods that was both successful and adaptable. The methods include providing positive innovative feedback. using and interactive media, and effectively and logically conveying the content. Together, these methods have created a very conducive learning environment in the classroom and enhanced students' enthusiasm for learning English. Furthermore, although facing low motivation or

challenges in acquiring the material, early career English teachers have been highly successful in their efforts to provide an enjoyable learning environment and encourage active student engagement. The methods that they used boosted students' confidence in speaking and writing in English while also encouraging their level of participation in the learning process. With emphasis communicative. an on encouraging, and innovative methods, this Freeman, D. (1986). Techniques and principles finding proves that early career English teachers could still make an important impact to students' English proficiency in public primary schools.

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