



The Challenge of Implementing Cambridge Curriculum in Elementary School

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ABSTRAK

Pengajaran bahasa Inggris di sekolah dasar telah menjadi isu yang populer karena keputusan Menteri Pendidikan bahwa bahasa Inggris akan menjadi mata pelajaran wajib untuk sekolah dasar. Beberapa sekolah dasar telah menggunakan kurikulum Cambridge yang cukup menantang bagi para guru untuk mengajar di kelas bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tantangan penerapan kurikulum Cambridge dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris pada siswa Sekolah Dasar (SD) dengan pendekatan studi kasus. Subjek penelitian ini yaitu dua guru Bahasa Inggris. Metode dalam penelitian ini menggunakan *descriptive qualitative research* menggunakan *case study research design*. Pengumpulan data yang digunakan yaitu observasi dan wawancara yang dianalisa secara kualitatif melalui konten analisis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tantangan yang dihadapi oleh para guru dalam penerapan kurikulum Cambridge yaitu para guru membutuhkan waktu persiapan yang lebih lama untuk memulai pembelajaran; siswa mudah kehilangan konsentrasi selama pembelajaran; para siswa memiliki gaya belajar yang berbeda dan mereka merasa tidak percaya diri untuk praktik berbicara Bahasa Inggris. Untuk mengatasi permasalahan tersebut, para guru menggunakan variasi dan nada suara serta instruksi langsung untuk memulai pelajaran; mereka juga menggunakan berbagai jenis Teknik pengajaran seperti lagu, menonton video dan permainan. Selain itu, para guru juga menggunakan dua Bahasa, yaitu Bahasa Indonesia dan Bahasa Inggris dalam proses pembelajaran untuk mempermudah siswa dalam memahami pelajaran, serta melatih siswa untuk meningkatkan rasa percaya diri mereka dalam berbicara Bahasa Inggris.

ABSTRACT

English language teaching in elementary schools has become a popular issue due to the decision of the Minister of Education that English will be a compulsory subject for elementary schools. Some elementary schools have used the Cambridge curriculum which is quite challenging for teachers to teach in English classes. This study aims to analyze the challenges of implementing the Cambridge curriculum in teaching English to elementary school students with a case study approach. The subjects of this study were two English teachers. The method in this study used descriptive qualitative research using a case study research design. Data collection used was observation and interviews which were analyzed qualitatively through content analysis. The results of the study showed that the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the Cambridge curriculum were that teachers needed more preparation time to start learning; students easily lost concentration during learning; students had different learning styles and they felt insecure to practice speaking English. To overcome these problems, teachers used variations and tones of voice and direct instructions to start lessons; they also used various types of teaching techniques such as songs, watching videos and games. In addition, teachers also use two languages, namely Indonesian and English in the learning process to make it easier for students to understand the lessons, as well as train students to increase their confidence in speaking English.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The former Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Nadiem Makarim issued the latest regulations regarding implementing English subject for Elementary schools and *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* or equivalent. In Ministerial Reg perulation Number 12 of 2024 concerning Curriculum for Early Childhood Education, Primary Education Level, and Secondary Education Level, Nadiem states that English will be a mandatory subject for elementary school students and the equivalent. The regulations signed by Nadiem on March 25th, 2024 will be implemented step by step. In the initial stage, English will be an optional subject for the 2026/2027 academic year based on the readiness of each educational unit. English will be a mandatory subject in the 2027/2028 academic year (Kemendikbud, 2024). One of the advantageous for language learners to start

studying English within a critical period - before 12 or 13 years old (Benitez & Li, 2024; Porsch et al., 2023). Moreover, Children who commence second language acquisition at an early age are more likely to attain native-like ability than those who begin later (Alsaedi, 2023; Hartshorne et al., 2018; Hernandez et al., 2021). Starting English education at an earlier year has a huge effect on the L2 learners' skill ability. Earlier students in 5 and 9 years performed better in English reading and listening, indeed in this year the impact of English learners' characteristics on English proficiency tends to be stable. EFL with an earlier beginner performed better in ages 5 and 9 years than with a late beginner (Jaekel et al., 2022; Maamuujav et al., 2019). The early starters' English education at earlier years results in higher English learner score. Young learners as those aged between 5 to 12 years old (Butler, 2019; Hasselgreen, 2013). While, previous study classified young learners into two main groups: 5 to 7 years old, and 8 to 10 years old (Scott, W. A., & Ytreberg, 2001). Other study divided young learners based on their age. First, Preschool students ages 2 to 4 years are normally still at kindergarten school (Curtain, H. and Dahlberg, 2004). Second, Primary students ages 5 to 7 years and third Intermediate students ages 8 to 10 years formally at elementary school and the last early adolescent students ages 11 to 14 years formally at Junior high school. The characteristics of young learners are keen and enthusiastic learners, and need physical movement as much as stimulation for their thinking, and being together (Sabariah et al., 2020; Uysal & Yavuz, 2015). It is also stated that young learners were eager, passionate, and motivated students who are quickly aroused (Harris, 2022; Lo, 2024; Ramachandran et al., 2019). Previous study classified the characteristics of young learners are they are already very good in interpreting meaning without necessarily understanding the individual word, feeling pleasure in finding and creating fun in what they do, have a ready imagination therefore their words are full of imagination and fantasy.

Children between the ages of 5 to 7 years understand situations more quickly than they comprehend the language used, have a very short attention span, and occasionally struggle to distinguish between fact and fiction (Clark, 2022; Delamain & Spring, 2022; Marji et al., 2024). Moreover, when their ages of 8 to 10 years, they are able to tell the difference between fact and fiction (Martarelli et al., 2015; Walker et al., 2015), ask questions (Chai et al., 2023; Isrokatun et al., 2019; Ransom et al., 2024), and rely on the spoken word as well as the physical world to make inferences (Lazonder & Janssen, 2021; Weisberg et al., 2020). Young learners also show up because they are better than adult learners in understanding and imitating what they hear (Crosthwaite & Steeples, 2024; Neumann & Herodotou, 2020; Nguyen, 2021). Therefore, teaching young students is fun and rewarding, especially for educators who have a solid foundation in the theories and guidelines for doing so (Arnon & Christiansen, 2017; Gualtieri & Finn, 2022; Lichtman, 2016; May, 2015). Data collected from studies done by previous researchers related to the implementation of Cambridge curriculum. Previous study found the reasons to implement Cambridge curriculum in Elementary school and supporting factors for implementing this curriculum are funding, extra activities and parental participation (Yudha, 2016). Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors in implementing that curriculum was the change of the national curriculum and follow-up of supervision. Other study found that teachers faced difficulties in managing classroom activities, the unique learning characteristics of young learners, and the use of Indonesian language during English lessons (Pebriantini & Vianty, 2024). Moreover, some strategies such as learning through play strategy (Alghamdy, 2022; Jabbari & Peterson, 2023; Li et al., 2022), grouping strategy (Abbasi & Anthony, 2024; Rajitha & Alamelu, 2023; Ulla & Perales, 2021) and school modules overcome the challenges during EFL activity (Abramova et al., 2020; Egitim, 2022; Fearn, 2023). Previous study found that students got coaching before following examination and got coaching and assistance provided by the principal and teacher council on the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum at Madina Islamic School Middle School (Islam, Z. N., & Fajaria, 2022). Moreover, other study found that the effects of curriculum integration between Curriculum 2013 and Cambridge Curriculum in English is support each other well with satisfactory results (Simanjuntak, 2020). The implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in Elementary schools focuses on planning, evaluation and implementation (Islam, Z. N., & Fajaria, 2022; Salahuddin et al., 2013).

Therefore, to get comprehensive knowledge the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum in elementary schools, the study aims to explore the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the Cambridge curriculum in Elementary schools for low class (year 1, 2 and 3) and high class (year 4, 5 and 6) based on teachers' experiences. The difference between this study and the previous one is that the current study focused on the implementation of Cambridge curriculum in difference level of the class, namely low and high class. It is hoped that the result of the study can give insight for English teachers who will implement Cambridge curriculum in Elementary schools.

2. METHOD

This study used descriptive qualitative research type which used a case study research design. The subject of this study were two of the English teachers. Mr F and Mrs D who graduated from Master level for English education. The former has been teaching in year one for ten years and the later has been teaching in year four for four months in Elementary school.

The data was collected using observation and depth interview. The researcher observed six times during classroom sessions which each lasted for thirty minutes to observe the challenges faced by the teachers and the efforts which done by the teachers in implementing Cambridge curriculum. The researcher became a passive observer during class learning, sitting at the back to maintain classroom atmosphere was conducive to study. The researcher made a detailed observation checklist to observe clearly all the activities done by the teachers started from the beginning when they started of the lesson and ended the lesson. The observation checklist provided the data easy to code and categorize it which is very helpful for analyzing the data. To get more complete data, all the classroom performance also had been recorded using recording devices. Both teachers were also interviewed individually in outside of class teaching. The type of interview used was structured interviews covering open questions. The interview used Indonesian to get more detail data and it was recorded after getting permission from the teachers for confidential aspect. All the data from interviews were transcribed. For the purpose of the credibility of data, all the transcribing from interview were validated by two expert researchers. Mrs M and Mr.A who graduated from doctorate program and active doing the qualitative research. For confidentiality purposes the teacher's names were coded. All data obtained from observation and interview were analyzed qualitatively through content analysis approach by with six steps: (1)transcription, familiarization with the data, and selection of quotations, (2) selection of keywords, (3) coding, (4) theme development, (5) conceptualization through interpretation of keywords, codes, and themes and (6) development of conceptual model (Naeem et al., 2023).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study found four challenges in implementing the Cambridge curriculum in English learning in year one and four. They are teachers need longer preparation to start the lesson; students easily lost concentration during the lesson; students had different styles of learning and students were not confidence to practice speaking English. Based on the observation and interview, the first challenge for the teachers in year one and four were teachers needed longer preparation to start the lesson. Some students still talked with their friends, they had not yet sat in their seat, they still ate snack, they went out to the toilet. As young leaners, they tend to be move actively from one place to others.

Mr F: "When conditioning the students in year one, the common challenge encountered in low level is that they tend to be kinesthetic or behave in a manner typical of children. Teaching in low class, we often need to prepare specific methods or techniques to handle the children".

Mrs. D: "In year four, my English class is conducted after break time, so students are sometimes not ready for the next lesson".

The second challenge that also happened both in the low and high classes was students lost their concentration during the lesson which lasts for 30 minutes. Based on the observation, some students started to be bored, lost their attention, and made noises by chatting to others, while their teacher was explaining the lesson even some boys asked permission to go to toilet.

Mr. F: "The problem faced in the middle of learning, students start to lose their focus and concentration. At that time, they tend to do other activities such as playing the pencil cases, chatting with friends around their seats."

Mrs. D: "During the learning process, in the middle of teaching and learning activities, the children's focus has been diverted to other things. At the beginning of learning they can still be conditioned."

The third challenge faced by the teachers was students had different styles of learning, some of them have kinesthetic, visual and auditory learning style.

Mr. F: "Students have different styles in learning. Some of them kinesthetic, audio-visual, auditory and so on."

Mrs. D: "Students have differences in learning style in the class. Some students are auditory, kinesthetic, audio visual, so I use several teaching techniques in teaching so that students understand what are being studied thoroughly in the class."

The last challenge was students were not confident to practice speaking English. Based on the observation, some students felt difficult to answer their teacher's questions although he asked simple questions and used basic English and repeated questions several times such as "Please open the door, please everyone be quiet". It might be because their English vocabulary are still weak. The teacher found that some students also had problems in using their English orally. They were not confidence and fear of making mistakes when they use it. Therefore, they tend to use Bahasa Indonesia when they asked permission to do something. This happened in year four as high level of elementary school.

Mr. F: "In terms of ability in English vocabulary, teachers must deal with it well. This happened because the students' backgrounds are different. Some students were from bilingual kindergartens; therefore, they had understood some basic English vocabulary, and others who have not yet learned English at their kindergartens."

Mrs. D: "Students at year four are still difficult to answer their teacher's questions although the questions use basic and simple English vocabulary. Only a few students understand them. Instruction such as "open the door, please!" Sometimes it is still difficult for them to understand it may be because they are not used to use it."

Mrs. D: "Students are afraid of making mistakes so they are not confident to practice speaking English. They often communicate to use Indonesian when they ask for permission because they are afraid of using the wrong English vocabularies."

Based on the challenges discussed above, the teachers had done effort to overcome. The teachers used variation and intonation of voice and direct instruction to start the lesson. Based on the observation, the teacher in year one sometimes imitated kids' voice in giving instructions that were appropriate for the students. He sometimes said the word "Bismillah" as the sign for students that the lesson will be started. On the other hand, to remind students that the lesson will be started, the English teacher in year four used direct instruction to start the lesson such as "Let's start our lesson" then students will directly sit in their seat and ready to start the lesson.

Mr. F: "I have to prepare certain methods or techniques to handle children's readiness. Teacher has to be more childish, positioning ourselves more at the same age as the learners, setting the intonation of voice. I also use the words to motivate them so that they are more interested in following the lessons. The point is before opening the materials, I have to prepare myself and make the lesson as interesting as possible for the children".

Mrs. D: "To prepare the students, I usually wait for a moment, but if they are not ready yet, I give a command directly, for example, "Let's start our lesson".

Moreover, to overcome some students who started to be bored and made noises in the progress of learning. The teachers often used songs, ice-breaking, videos and games to make students were not bored to study during the lesson. Based on the observation, Mrs. D used videos taken from YouTube to keep students focusing on the lesson then asked students to do the exercises then it would be discussed together. It was supported from the results from interviews.

Mr. F: "The school actually provides a good curriculum, namely Cambridge, which really helps teachers, especially in terms of content. The solution that we can do is just focused on the teaching techniques used in the class. The content is already in the curriculum, the teacher just needs to execute it during learning by using teaching techniques which are not monotonous. I seek some other teaching techniques which appropriate for children such as using games, ice-breaking or singing the English songs."

Mrs. D: "I usually use video in the middle of the lesson to refresh them, so they do not only listen my explanations. After watching video, they have to answer some questions. When they finished doing them, then we discuss their answer together. There are also some simple quizzesto to do, so they can focus back on the materials."

To solve students who had different styles of learning, teachers used many kinds of teaching techniques and media. Teachers used active learning, using songs, videos and games in the class. Based on observation, the teachers used both Western songs such as *Good Morning, my Bonnie* and Indonesian national songs such as "*Bendera Merah putih, Garuda Pancasila*". This made students looked happy and full of spirit when they sang songs.

Mr. F: "Teachers usually use various approaches in learning. Of course, this is also supported by the curriculum we used, namely the Cambridge curriculum. We have a group that taught teachers several teaching techniques that can be applied in the classroom"

Mrs. D: "I use games that provide students to move their body, which is suitable for students who tend to be kinesthetic. For auditory students, I usually use videos, and song."

Furthermore, to solve students who felt not confident to speak English and difficult to answer their teacher's questions, teachers often spoke using both Indonesian and English in explaining materials to make students understand materials. Some students did not understand if their teachers spoke fully in English. On the other hand, to reduce students' fear of making mistakes in speaking English, the teacher used drilling to improve their self-confidence. The teacher drilled to use phrases used in daily conversation regularly and repeated several times to make students familiar more with those daily phrases. Then students had to practice in conversation among their friends. She also sometimes used games to help students use their English. These techniques improve students' confidence.

Mr. F: "The teachers use the code-switching method, combining English with Indonesian. For certain points that we find difficult to explain, we use Indonesian more."

Mrs. D: "Because students have lack of vocabulary, I have to introduce words that they do not know yet, to make them understand the materials being taught. When there are questions or exercises to do, I usually provide the meanings of important words that have been translated into Indonesian. They can write small notes in their books to write the meaning from the words that they do not know. By watching the video, they will understand some new English vocabulary."

Mrs. D: "To improve students' confident, I drill students with daily phrases which are often used every day. Usually at the beginning of learning, I give them a game, then they have to guess the meaning of phrases."

Based on the observation and depth interviews, to support the implementation of Cambridge curriculum, the school created activity called Reading log program to foster students' competence in English. This activity is carried out once a week in Friday during 30 minutes. School provides the English books for students to read in their own class monitored by their teacher. Each student has to choose one book to read and the teacher will write each student' progress to explore his/her reading comprehension related to how many books that he/she has read.

During the observation, the 4th grade teacher sometimes asked students to read aloud and she spent a few minutes listening to the students' reading. Each student read one page in turn. If there was an inaccurate pronunciation during the reading, she corrected it directly. She used the *Super Minds* book for grade 4. This indicated that she was actively involved in monitoring and correcting the students' pronunciation to ensure their English pronunciation is accurate. While students were reading, Mrs. D took the opportunity to introduce new vocabulary.

Mr. F: "Teacher creates a reading log program that is included in the intra-curriculum. This activity is held once a week to provide much English exposure to create English atmosphere to increase English literacy. Reading logs is also a solution to children's interactions in reading books, because even at home they are constrained by books or time so they are not able to read the English books."

Mrs. D: "I inserted reading at certain times to read. Sometimes I accompanied them to read. Student A read from sheet 1 to the next sheet, other students adjusted their turns. If there is an inaccurate pronunciation, then I can correct it directly. When they read the English book, I can also teach new English vocabularies to them."

Discussion

This study found that students were bored and lost of their attention during the study. This finding is in line with the research done by study who found five main challenges that might be encountered by English teachers of young learners are cognitive development, motivation, attention, multilevel groups, and assessment (Nunan, 2016). The reason why the finding of this research in line with the research done by Nunan, this might be because one of the characters of young learners is they cannot focus for long time. It is supported the study done by study who argue that young learners get bored quickly (Supri & Simatupang, 2019). The finding of this research also supports the research done by study who found that during teaching and learning process, some students began to lack of discipline in following lessons (Widodo, 2019).

The current study found that the teachers faced the problem related to the varied learning styles in the class. This finding is agreed the study done by study who found the teacher faced problems in teaching related to students who have different needs (Prawiro & Anggrarini, 2019). To solve this matter, teachers used active learning. This finding is supported study by study who found that the teacher used active learning and focused on student-centered in the implementation of Cambridge curriculum in Elementary school of Kalam Kudus Surakarta (Pratiwi, 2018). This might be because both studies done in Elementary school level in Surakarta Central Java. It is also in line with the study done by study who found that every student has unique requirements, desires, and a unique personality (Jannah et al., 2022).

Moreover, this study also found that students were not confidence to speak English. This finding is supported the study who found that students were not confidence to speak English (Utami & Husein, 2021). This study found that some students did not understand when their teachers instructed them using simple and basic of English and only few of them understood the instructions. This is in line with the study done who found the same finding of this matter related to students' mastery of the English vocabulary (Syafi'i, 2019). The study done by other study also supports the finding of this current study that teachers faced problems in practicing English caused students only have small basic of English (Kusumawati et al., 2022). Other study strengthen with similar finding that students are not able to use English because they did not habituate to practice their English in their daily life (Widjanarko et al., 2018). However, the result of this study is different from the study who found that the students were confident to use their English. The reason might be because the environment has influenced student's character (Pertiwi, 2019). The finding of this study is also different from the study done who found that the integration of 2013 curriculum and Cambridge curriculum enhances students' abilities in their English language (Hasanah, 2019).

This study found that to control students' pay attention, teachers used enjoyable activities such as games, singing a song or watching video. It was contrast with previous research done found that the teacher makes summary for time efficiency (Widjanarko et al., 2018), while study found that giving reward to the students made them get spirit to study and respect their teacher (Prawiro & Anggrarini, 2019). Other study has similar finding who found that the teacher made material summary to help students studying by themselves (Kusumawati et al., 2022; Widjanarko et al., 2018).

The findings of this study were also different with studies found that teacher had limited time in teaching English (Kusumawati et al., 2022; Widjanarko et al., 2018). The finding is also different from the study who found that the teacher felt difficult to understand the terms in Cambridge curriculum (Ramadan & Widagsa, 2022), while other study found the teacher got ambiguity to select instructional strategies and media (Utami & Husein, 2021).

Moreover, other study found that from 102 teachers in South Sulawesi found that students always perceived or think English is difficult (Sakkir et al., 2021). These differences happened because the topics to investigate were also different from this recent study. The discussion is intended to interpret and interpret the research results according to the theory used and not just explain the findings. The discussion must be enriched by referring to or comparing the results of previous studies that have been published in reputable scientific journals. In the discussion, it is also suggested to integrate research results into a collection of established theories or knowledge, formulation of new theories, modification of existing theories, and implications of research results.

4. CONCLUSION

The results showed that there were four challenges faced by teachers in implementing Cambridge curriculum for either year one and four were longer preparation to start the lesson, students lost their concentration in the middle of the study, students had different style of learning, and felt not confidence and fear of making mistakes when they spoke English. To overcome those problems, the teachers used variation and intonation of voice and direct instruction to start the lesson, used songs, ice-breaking, videos and games, used varied of teaching techniques and varied media, used both Indonesian and English in explaining materials and drill students to improve their confidence in using their English.

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