



NAVIGATING CHALLENGES: STUDENT TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS AT KAMPUS MENGAJAR

Meissy Anis Apriani¹, Dedy Kurniawan², Indri Anastasia³

English Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Jambi^{1,2,3}

Corresponding email: indri.anastasia@unja.ac.id

Abstract

This qualitative research aims to describe the challenges faced by student teachers from the English Department during the Kampus Mengajar Program and the strategies employed to overcome those challenges. The study utilizes the qualitative method and a case study approach to conduct an in-depth investigation. The research involved four participants: two enrolled in Kampus Mengajar Batch 6 and the other two in Batch 7. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the participating students and teachers. Braun and Clarke's Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data. The findings revealed that participants encountered several challenges while teaching English to young learners, categorized into challenges arising from the school environment and stemming from the student teachers themselves. The study also identified various strategies used to address these challenges, including building self-management strategies, coping with student characteristics, and varying teaching strategies. Additionally, the findings suggested that student teachers require guidance from lecturers to ensure that the strategies they implement align with the demands of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) coursework.

Keywords: Teaching English to young learners, Kampus Mengajar, challenges, strategies

To cite this article:

Apriani, Meissy Anis; Anastasia, Indri; and Kurniawan, Dedy. (2025). Navigating Challenges: Student Teachers' Experiences in Teaching English to Young Learners at Kampus Mengajar. *Journal of Research on Language Education*, 6(1), 31-36.

INTRODUCTION

Student teachers are individuals who are currently studying to become teachers. Rokhayani (2016) states these individuals are still in the learning phase and are preparing themselves. This preparation is beneficial for them before they enter the teaching profession to educate and shape the minds of future students. In this research, the student teachers referred to students from the English Education study program who participated in the Kampus Mengajar program.

Kampus Mengajar Program is an initiative of the *Kementrian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi* (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, henceforth Kemendikbudristek) of the Republic of Indonesia to raise the standard of instruction in elementary schools, especially in *terdepan, terluar, tertinggal* (frontier, outermost and least developed 3T henceforth) areas. The objective of the Kampus Mengajar program is to empower students to actively participate in the educational activities of nearby primary, secondary, or high schools, either in their residential area or at a location they have chosen for their placement (Anugrah, 2021). Students from all academic programs at any university that has implemented Kurikulum Merdeka in Indonesia are eligible to participate in this program.

Students enrolled in this program are tasked to assist schools in some ways, such as enhancing literacy and numeracy proficiencies, facilitating technology integration, and aiding with administrative tasks (Arfi & Hidayati, 2023). As student teachers from the English department, students are asked to introduce English learning to students at school as a requirement for success in completing learning activities at partner institutions. Besides introducing English to students at the target school, the students also should meet all requirements. For instance, the English Education study program at one of the universities in Jambi allows students to participate in the Kampus Mengajar program by providing a *Formulir Kesepakatan Perolehan Kredit Pembelajaran Program Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (Learning Credit Acquisition Agreement form henceforth KPKP form). This

form includes a list of courses that need to be converted; the courses are completed with the learning outcome. One of the courses is "Teaching English for Young Learners" (Henceforth TEYL). The required learning outcomes include designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating English learning programs for young learners.

To enhance students' literacy skills in both Indonesian and English, a range of strategic measures has been implemented. Certain student teachers, whose placement institutions do not require English courses, are even eager to establish extra lessons. The supplementary classes are designed for students who have a keen interest in acquiring English language skills through participation in a form of the English Club. English is taught by educators in schools to enable students to gain fundamental English language skills. To acquire these skills, students first acquire vocabulary. Harahap (2024) states that when learning English, the primary skill that students must acquire is a high level of vocabulary proficiency.

The urgency of this study increases considering the importance of foreign language mastery as a basic skill that must be possessed by the younger generation in the era of globalization. It is anticipated that through teachers' suitable and efficient instruction, pupils will not only be able to understand and use new vocabulary but will also be able to develop broader communication skills, which will ultimately support the overall improvement of the quality of national education. This urgency has received a positive response from the government. Kemendikbudristek announced a significant decision:

"Mata pelajaran Bahasa Inggris pada sekolah dasar, madrasah ibtidaiyah, atau bentuk lain yang sederajat menjadi mata pelajaran pilihan yang dapat diselenggarakan berdasarkan kesiapan Satuan Pendidikan sampai dengan tahun ajaran 2026/2027 dan beralih menjadi mata pelajaran wajib pada tahun ajaran 2027/2028" (Kemendikbud, 2024).

"English courses at elementary schools, madrasah *ibtidaiyah*, or other comparable institutions can be offered as electives until the 2026-2027 school year, depending on the Education Unit's preparedness, and then become required in the 2027-2028 school year". This step is implemented through Permendikbudristek Number 12/2024 (Kemendikbud, 2024).

According to Nunan (2010), no method can be considered "perfect," as each comes with its own set of strengths and weaknesses. Although Nunan suggests that no learning method can be considered perfect, there are still several activities that can be chosen. Bakhsh (2016) asserts that games are among the engaging activities that young learners are interested in. Young learners can interact, investigate, and try out their surroundings by playing games. In addition to increasing students' enthusiasm, games also motivate and stimulate them to utilize the language. Another strategy involves using songs. If the instructor plays music or invites the class to join in on a song, the students are more likely to enjoy the session (Deni & Fahriany, 2020). Based on Elkhimry (2022), incorporating stories into the classroom can help students stay more engaged with the lesson. Through storytelling, learners can express themselves using language derived from their unique ideas and creations. Another approach to language instruction that blends speech and movement is called Total Physical Response (TPR), which is essentially language instruction through movement (Suryana et al., 2021).

Nunan (2010) claims that there are numerous obstacles to teaching English to young learners, including their cognitive development, motivation, attention, multi-level group of students, and assessment. From another perspective Ridhwan et al. (2022), the difficulty faced by teachers in instructing young learners is motivation. During the English teaching and learning process, children's motivation to learn the language was still low, and teachers were unsure of how to boost this drive. Don't let students or even the parents of students think that learning English is difficult. English instruction at the children's level is learning at a fun level, so learning English for children is presented not only at the level of memorization or solely to improve their cognitive abilities but more to play while learning English

Although there is a lot of study on the Kampus Mengajar program, little of it specifically addresses English teaching to young learners. In this context, Kampus Mengajar allows early-semester student teachers, who have not had any prior knowledge about TEYL to participate and the study program requires them to teach English to elementary school students as part of course credit conversion requirements for Kampus Mengajar program. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the challenges these student teachers face and the strategies they employ. This research can offer significant perspectives for student teachers participating in the next batch of Kampus Mengajar program or other teaching practices to enhance their strategies for teaching English to young learners.

RESEARCH METHOD

To achieve the purpose of this research, the researcher employed qualitative research with a case study approach. This research design was chosen because the researcher wants to examine in depth the phenomena that occur in teaching English, particularly the challenges faced by student teachers and their strategies to overcome them. According to Sandelowski (2000), qualitative research is a general term that encompasses a variety of strategies and attitudes toward inquiry that are designed to elucidate how humans comprehend, interpret, experience, and create the social world. According to Rusandi and Rusli (2021), a case study approach is an extensive set of scientific investigations conducted to learn in-depth details about a program, event, or activity at the level of an individual, a group of individuals, an institution, or an organization. Gall et al. (2003) in Duff (2012) characterize case study research as "the thorough examination of examples of a phenomenon in both its natural setting and from the viewpoint of those who are experiencing it." This approach followed the researcher's aim to produce comprehensive findings by examining teaching English to young learners in-depth.

The site of this research is one of the universities in Jambi. The researcher employed purposive sampling to carefully choose the appropriate participant for this investigation. Purposive sampling, sometimes referred to as judgment sampling, is the deliberate selection of an informant according to particular qualities they have (Dolores and Tongco, 2007). The researcher divided the participant recruitment process into two stages. The first stage was the preliminary stage, where a Google form was distributed to participants of Kampus Mengajar batches 6 and 7 to determine whether the respondents met the criteria. The second stage was the interview. The type of qualitative analysis being used determines the sample size, Creswell and Creswell (2018) stating that there are four or five cases in a case study approach. In this study, the researcher focused on four participants. The technique used by the researcher in collecting data in the form of interviews. The researcher utilized analytical techniques to investigate the data acquired from the participants. Thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), is a methodical process for finding, examining, and summarizing themes or patterns of meaning in data.

Before collecting data, the researcher developed an interview protocol. To ensure reliability, the research instrument was validated after its construction. External reliability was ensured by having the validator thoroughly assess the design, content, and structure of the instrument to align it with the research objectives and methodological standards. The validator evaluated whether the instrument effectively captured relevant data and was clear, concise, and error-free.

This investigation implemented the member-checking methodology to establish trust with the participants in this research. Creswell (2013) stated that to ascertain the precision of the qualitative findings, implement member checking. This involves returning the transcribed verbatim final report, specific descriptions or themes to participants, and ascertaining whether they believe them to be accurate and to avoid biases from the researcher. The researcher moved forward with the analysis after confirmation had been received.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher interviewed four students from the English Department at one of the universities in Jambi. They answered the researcher's questions related to their experience regarding the challenges in teaching English during the Kampus Mengajar program. All of them were student teachers from the English Department who had completed Kampus Mengajar in batches 6 and 7. Firstly, the researcher asked the participants about their names, semester, batch of Kampus Mengajar, and teaching experience. For the confidentiality of the participants, the researcher replaced their names with pseudonyms so their privacy would not be exposed. The following table describes the participant's data.

Table 1. Background of the Participants

Participants	Batch of KM	Name of the School	Area	Teaching experiences prior to KM
P1	6	SDN 211/IV Kota Jambi	Urban	None
P2	6	SDN 187/III Koto Kapeh	Rural	None
P3	7	SDN 120/IV Jambi	Urban	Private teacher
P4	7	SD Negeri 1 Lais	Rural	None

The thematizing process was categorizing the data by grouping the participants' answers that often appeared or were mentioned by them. The data grouping was based on analyzing what challenges the participant experienced while teaching English in the Kampus Mengajar program and related to the relevant question this research asked. While in the thematizing process, the researcher found five big themes and 21 sub-themes.

Table 2. Theme and Sub-themes

	Themes	Sub-themes
Student Teachers' Challenges	Challenges from the school	Students' low motivation Students' difficult behaviour Mixed-ability students Lack of learning facility
	Challenges from the student teachers	Lack of guidance and knowledge for TEYL Student teachers' time management
Student Teachers' Strategies	Building self-management strategy	Setting priorities Discussion with Mentor Teacher Finding inspiration online Providing self-supplied Media and Facility
	Coping with student behaviour	Giving appreciation Giving advice Giving responsibility
	Varying teaching strategy	Using audio-lingual method Practicing memorization Combining visual and auditory Utilizing visuals Using Total Physical Response (TPR) Using game Utilizing low-resources technology Using ice breaking

The research findings from the preceding part are discussed in this section. The discussion is carried out based on the research question: first, what are the challenges faced by student teachers in teaching English to young learners at Kampus Mengajar program? Second, how do the student teachers overcome the challenges? Furthermore, this chapter discusses and compares the findings with related theories in previous studies. Four student teachers from Kampus Mengajar batch 6 and 7 who participated in this study encountered challenges in teaching English and then had strategies to overcome them.

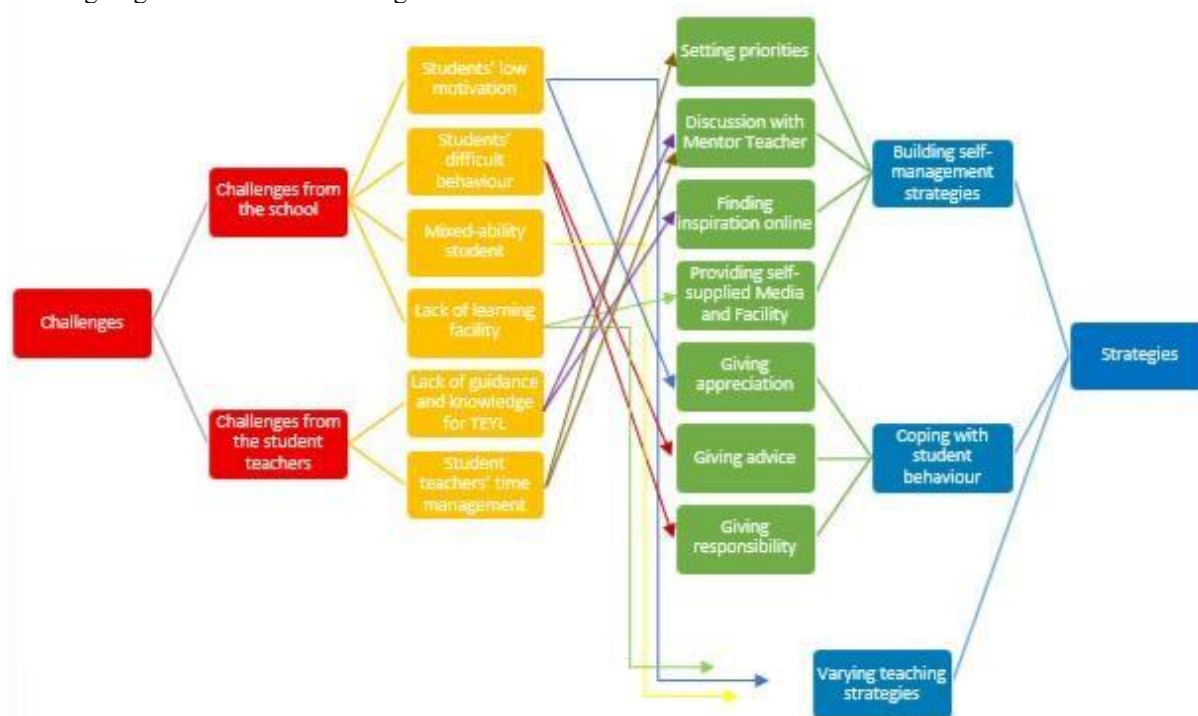


Figure 1. The summary of the Theme and Sub-theme of the Findings

The researchers selected participants from two areas, urban and rural, based on the assumption that these factors might influence two aspects: first, the facilities available, and second, the student's prior exposure to English. However, after interviewing four participants from each area in the Kampus Mengajar program, it turned out that these factors did not significantly affect the results. This is because the schools assigned by the Kampus

Mengajar program had relatively similar standards, regardless of their location. Therefore, the initial assumption of choosing participants from urban and rural areas proved to be irrelevant. Based on the previously presented data, the student teachers experienced several challenges while teaching English to young learners, further divided into themes and sub-themes. One of the challenges is students' low motivation, which student teachers mitigate through ice-breaking activities and giving appreciation. These strategies align with Ridhwan et al. (2022) those who emphasize that engaging activities and positive reinforcement are key to motivating young learners. By incorporating interactive and rewarding methods, the student teachers successfully created a more engaging learning environment.

Another challenge identified was students' difficult behavior, which was addressed by providing advice and assigning responsibilities. This approach reflects the findings of Browne (2013) those who suggested that guiding students with clear communication about appropriate behaviour and empowering them with responsibilities can lead to improved classroom behavior. The lack of learning resources also posed a challenge, prompting student teachers to rely on providing self-supplied media and facilities. These findings are consistent with the work of Bukit (2024), who noted that resourcefulness and creativity are crucial for overcoming the limitations of teaching resources. Additionally, student teachers encountered the complexity of teaching multi-level group students, which they tackled by using various teaching methods and focusing on vocabulary development. This aligns with Nunan, (2010) and Permana (2020), who stated that differentiated instruction and emphasis on vocabulary are effective strategies for handling diverse proficiency levels in TEYL classrooms. This is also in line with the objectives of the Kampus Mengajar program outlined in the Kampus Mengajar batch 6 guidebook (Kemendikbud, 2023), which focuses on enhancing creativity and innovation in designing models, methods, strategies, and enjoyable learning techniques. Furthermore, in the absence of specific guidance for TEYL, student teachers sought advice from others, including mentor teachers and a previous batch of KM, and primarily drew inspiration from the internet. The interviews revealed that student teachers show significant initiative in finding references and executing a variety of activities for their English teaching projects for young learners in schools. However, it is implied by their responses that they still require guidance and reassurance to confirm that they are on the right track and aligned with established standards and best practices. This is supported by Okumu et al. (2022), who emphasized the importance of mentoring in developing teaching competencies

CONCLUSION

The study's findings suggest that the Kampus Mengajar program participants faced various challenges and employed the solutions that will be covered in the following paragraphs.

Participants face several challenges while participating in the program, including challenges from the school and the student teachers. Additionally, the researchers identified several strategies employed by the English Department student teachers to overcome these challenges. These strategies were primarily aimed at fulfilling the learning outcomes of the TEYL (Teaching English to Young Learners) course. The strategies used include building self-management strategies, coping with student behavior, and strategies related to teaching strategies.

Although there is no specific guidance provided by the department for the TEYL project before the Kampus Mengajar program, the student teachers have employed various teaching strategies, such as audio-lingual, memorization, visual, visual-auditory, TPR, and game-based learning. This demonstrates that experiential learning among students enhances their initiative to seek ideas and carry out diverse activities related to TEYL, regardless of the effectiveness of the methods they used. Therefore, based on the data found, it is important to highlight that students still require guidance from lecturers to ensure that the programs they implement align with the expectations of the study program.

Kampus Mengajar teaches students many valuable lessons, especially when student teachers connect the challenges they face with the strategies they develop to overcome them. Through these strategies, essential soft skills emerge, such as critical thinking, creativity, and the ability to persevere. These skills not only help to solve immediate teaching challenges but also play a significant role in personal growth, preparing student teachers for future challenges in their professional lives.

REFERENCES

- Anugrah, T. M. F. (2021). Implementasi Pelaksanaan Program Kampus Mengajar Angkatan 1 Terdampak Pandemi Covid-19. *Akselerasi: Jurnal Ilmiah Nasional*, 3(3), 38–47. <https://doi.org/10.54783/jin.v3i3.458>
- Arfi, S. W., & Hidayati, C. (2023). Peran Mahasiswa Program Kampus Mengajar Angkatan 5 dalam Meningkatkan Kemampuan Literasi dan Bumerasi di Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Pengabdian Nasional*, 03(03), 11–22.
- Bakhsh, S. A. (2016). Using Games as a Tool in Teaching Vocabulary to Young Learners. *English Language Teaching*, 9(7), 120. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n7p120>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Applied Qualitative Research in Psychology. *Applied Qualitative Research in Psychology*,

- 0887(2006). <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-35913-1>
- Browne, K. (2013). Challenging Behaviour in Secondary School Students: Classroom Strategies for Increasing Positive Behaviour. *Teachers' Work*, 10(1), 125–147. <https://doi.org/10.24135/teacherswork.v10i1.576>
- Bukit, E. S. B. (2024). *The Challenges during the Kampus Mengajar Program: a Case Study of English Department Students*. Jambi: S1 thesis, Universitas Jambi.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Deni, R., & Fahriany, F. (2020). Teachers' Perspective on Strategy for Teaching English Vocabulary to Young Learners. *Vision: Journal for Language and Foreign Language Learning*, 9(1), 48–61. <https://doi.org/10.21580/vjv9i14862>
- Dolores, M., & Tongco, C. (2007). Definition of Purposive Sampling. *A Journal of Plants, People and Applied Research*, 5, 1–12.
- Duff, P. A. (2012). Case Study Research in Applied Linguistics. In *Case Study Research in Applied Linguistics* (1st ed., Vol. 9780203827). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203827147>
- Elkhimry, H. A. (2022). Storytelling: an Effective Method to Teach English language for Young Learners. *Science and Knowledge Horizons Journal*, 2(02), 425–435. <https://doi.org/10.34118/jskp.v2i02.2727>
- Harahap, A. N. (2024). Tantangan Guru dalam Mengajar Vocabulary Bahasa Inggris di SD Negeri 060813 Medan. *Gudang Jurnal Multidisiplin Ilmu*, 2, 131–137.
- Kemendikbud. (2023). *Buku Panduan Kampus Mengajar Angkatan 6 Tahun 2023*. Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi.
- Kemendikbud. (2024). *Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Nomor 12 Tahun 2024 tentang Kurikulum pada Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, Jenjang Pendidikan Dasar, dan Jenjang Pendidikan Menengah*. Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi.
- Nunan, D. (2010). *Teaching English to Young Learners* (1st ed.). Anaheim University Press.
- Permana, I. G. Y. (2020). Teaching Vocabulary for Elementary School Students. *The Art of Teaching English as a Foreign Language*, 1(2), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.36663/tatefl.v1i2.56>
- Ridhwan, M., Yeni, M., & Husna, A. I. (2022). Teachers' Challenges in Teaching English for Young Learners during Indonesia's School-based Curriculum. *Asatiza: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 3(3), 172–179.
- Rokhayani, A. (2016). Assessing student teachers' performance in English class through teaching video. *International Conference on Teacher Training and Education*, 1(5), 328–331.
- Rusandi, & Rusli, M. (2021). Merancang Penelitian Kualitatif Dasar/Deskriptif dan Studi Kasus. *Al-Ubudiyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Studi Islam*, 2(1), 48–60. <https://doi.org/10.55623/au.v2i1.18>
- Sandelowski, M. (2000). Whatever Happened to Qualitative Description? *Research in Nursing and Health*, 23(4), 334–340. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240x\(200008\)23:4<334::aid-nur9>3.0.co;2-g](https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240x(200008)23:4<334::aid-nur9>3.0.co;2-g)
- Suryana, D., Sari, N. E., Winarti, Lina, Mayar, F., & Satria, S. (2021). English Learning Interactive Media for Early Childhood through the Total Physical Response Method. *JPUD - Jurnal Pendidikan Usia Dini*, 15(1), 60–80. <https://doi.org/10.21009/jpud.151.04>