LEARNING ENGLISH IN PRIMARY SCHOOL ACTIVITY PLAN: A STUDY OF TEACHERS WITH A NON-ENGLISH BACKGROUND

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Article Info	Abstract
	English language learning in primary schools still needs more attention, especially regarding teacher training in designing effective lesson plans. Many teachers do not have an English language education background and have never received training in designing English language learning activities, so they have difficulty developing materials that meet students' needs. This study aims to determine how primary school teachers develop and implement English language learning activities in the classroom. This study used a qualitative approach with data collection through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. The research subjects were two primary school teachers with a classroom teacher education background and teaching experience of 6 and 11 years respectively. The results showed that the teachers developed learning by watching learning videos and consulting with more experienced colleagues as a form of initiative and creativity in dealing with limited competencies and resources. They also face challenges in adapting methods to different student learning styles and managing limited learning time. Observations show that although the implementation of lesson plans is going according to plan, there are still problems with student participation, understanding of the material, and the effectiveness of activities, so adjustments to teaching strategies are needed. This study highlights the importance of sustained and equitable professional development so that all teachers, including those without an English education background, are able to teach adaptively and effectively in diverse classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

In some countries, English is now compulsory in primary schools (Nguyen, 2011). In Indonesia, English is still a local content in the primary school curriculum (Widodo, 2016; Lestariyana & Widodo, 2018). This learning aims to develop communicative competence, cross-cultural understanding, confidence, and critical and creative thinking skills (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). The role of teachers is to support these objectives, so the development of professional teachers must be designed based on their needs (Garet et al., 2001; Kennedy & McKay, 2011).

English language teaching in primary schools requires teachers with good language competence and a flexible approach to teaching (Cameron, 2003; Butler, 2004). However, in Indonesia, many teachers do not have the formal qualifications to teach English at this level because the education program focuses more on preparing high school teachers (Yuwono & Harbon, 2010; Zein, 2017). In this context, teacher training is crucial so that they have the required skills. Uztosun (2018) identified 29 competencies required by primary school English teachers in Turkey, which include language learning theory, understanding of child

development, and skills in planning and classroom management. This shows that effective English language learning depends not only on the teacher's linguistic abilities but also on their pedagogical strategies. In addition, Burri (2018) highlights that non-native teachers often face challenges in implementing a more communicative approach. He proposes seven stages in a teaching approach to help primary school teachers, including two relevant practices in this context. Therefore, improving teacher training and professionalism is a key factor in the success of English language teaching at the primary school level.

English language learning in primary schools in Indonesia faces various challenges, especially in terms of teacher preparedness, limited resources, and lack of clear curriculum guidelines (Zein, 2014; Sulistiyo et al., 2019). Teachers often do not have adequate English language education backgrounds and lack professional training, which impacts teaching effectiveness (Widodo, 2016, 2018; Hawanti, 2014). In rural areas, these obstacles are compounded by limited access to learning materials and low exposure to English outside the classroom (Ssentanda et al., 2019). The Merdeka curriculum is expected to be a solution with a more flexible approach, enabling the development of more contextualized teaching materials and increasing direct interaction in English language learning. However, further research is still needed to understand how this curriculum can improve student participation and the effectiveness of teacher instruction in the context of English as a foreign language at the primary school level.

One of the main focuses of the Merdeka curriculum is to help students improve their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in English. However, this transition is a big challenge for many teachers, especially those who do not have an English language education background. With the return of English as a subject, teachers must be able to adapt and create new ways of teaching so that the curriculum can deliver the material more effectively. This study focuses on how English learning activities in primary schools develop in the context of the independent curriculum, something that has not been widely explored in previous research.

The Merdeka Curriculum encourages the application of more interactive teaching methods to support this process. Teachers are encouraged to integrate group discussions, individual learning, and collaboration-based activities in the classroom. This approach allows students to work together, exchange information, and learn to solve problems, thus significantly improving their English skills (Hardman, 2008). This curriculum also seeks to avoid traditional methods that rely solely on memorization and teacher instruction by providing more space for students to participate actively through dialogue and discussion. This is expected to create a more enjoyable and supportive learning environment.

Although the Merdeka policy aims to improve the effectiveness of English language teaching through a communicative approach, its implementation faces various obstacles. One of the main challenges is teachers' readiness, especially those who are not native English speakers, to adapt to more complex teaching methods (Hu, 2006). In addition, the reality on the ground often differs from the designed policy. As found in Sri Lanka, the gap between policy and practice hinders the effectiveness of learning time, with teachers in rural areas allocating more time to active learning than teachers in urban areas (Little et al., 2019). This is also the case in Japan, where the 2011 PSE policy has been inconsistently implemented due to administrative and operational challenges (Ng, 2016). Similar challenges can be found in Indonesia, especially in adapting the new curriculum to the diverse conditions of schools, from urban to rural. Hence, the effectiveness of English teaching still varies greatly.

Children have great potential for learning English early because they are naturally enthusiastic, able to process language implicitly and excel at imitating the sounds and rhythms of the language (Paradis, 2004; Johnstone, 2009). However, the effectiveness of this learning depends heavily on the method used. Studies in Singapore show that teaching tends to emphasize facts and procedures over concepts, limiting students' opportunities for critical

thinking (Lim et al., 2021). To address this, Burri (2018) recommends an input-based approach and theme-based learning, allowing students to have more affluent and meaningful learning experiences. Thus, learning English from an early age focuses on mastering the sounds and structures of the language and builds a deeper understanding of the language and culture being learned.

In the context of this study, English language learning activities in primary schools are the main focus to understand how children take advantage of this in their learning process. As a guide, McCloskey (2014) proposes eight essential principles for teaching English to children. These principles include making learning fun and active, encouraging collaboration in practicing the language, using diverse thematic activities, providing easy-to-understand materials, teaching vocabulary with an interactive approach, integrating language and content, respecting students' cultures of origin, and providing clear goals and feedback. These principles are relevant to ensure that learning in primary school is effective and meets the needs of children.

In Indonesia, English is studied as a foreign language, so students have a tiny opportunity to use it daily. Usually, English is only taught in academic environments such as schools and courses. The learning process is also often textbook-centered, focusing on grammar and sentence structure. Unfortunately, students rarely use English outside the classroom, even though to truly master it, they must actively and communicatively practice it daily. Some factors that influence the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum include teachers' confidence in the curriculum, the quality of training received, and the limited learning resources and supporting facilities (Obaidullah, 2012). Policymakers often assume that effective teaching practices will automatically follow curriculum policy, but this is not always the case (Kırkögz, 2008). The classroom atmosphere sometimes feels monotonous in English learning, so teachers need to find the right strategies to increase students' interest and enthusiasm. This is important so that learning objectives can be achieved. Based on the background described, this study focuses on two questions: (1) How do teachers develop English learning activities for public primary school students? (2) How is the Merdeka Curriculum implemented in English learning activities in the classroom?

RESEARCH METHOD
Research Design
This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design because it allows for an in-depth analysis of how teachers design and implement English language learning plans in primary schools. Case studies were chosen because they provide a richer understanding of the phenomenon under study in the context of education, especially in understanding the practices and challenges teachers face in designing English language learning. According to Yin (2014), the case study approach in social research helps maintain objectivity by looking at an event from various perspectives. It allows for in-depth exploration of the factors influencing a process.

This study used case studies to explore teachers' processes for preparing lesson plans, the learning methods they used, and the evaluation strategies they used. The analysis focused on how teachers choose and organize learning activities to suit the learning objectives and the challenges they face in the process. Interviews and document analysis were used to understand the factors influencing learning planning and implementation.

Research Participants
This study involved two primary school teachers from Central Java, Indonesia, who did not have an English language education background but were tasked with teaching English as part of their school curriculum. Both teachers were primary school education graduates and had experience teaching general subjects. Teachers have 6-11 years of teaching experience. The

selection criteria for participants were based on teaching experience, involvement in preparing English lesson plans, and availability of time to participate in the research. Although they had not received specific training in designing English learning activities, they had experience designing learning activities in general while studying primary school education. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling to ensure that the teachers selected were actively teaching English and had implemented lesson plans in their teaching.

Research Instruments

The main instruments in this study were interviews, observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore teachers' experiences designing and implementing English lesson plans, including their challenges. Observations were conducted to see how teachers implemented lesson plans in the classroom, while document analysis focused on the content and structure of the lesson plans created by teachers. To increase data validity, triangulation was carried out by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and analyzed documents. In addition, data confirmation was carried out by asking participants to review the findings obtained to ensure the accuracy of the information collected.

Data Analysis

Data obtained through interviews, observations, and document analysis were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to identify key patterns in the data systematically and flexibly in interpreting qualitative data. Thematic analysis is appropriate for this study because it provides a structure for organizing information based on emerging themes, making it easier to understand teachers' strategies and their challenges. The analysis stage begins with thoroughly rereading the data to identify the main themes. After that, the author coded the relevant information and looked for patterns that emerged in the data. A validation process was carried out to ensure accuracy by comparing findings from various data sources (interviews, observations, and documents). The final stage was to compile a report based on the main findings, supported by evidence in the form of quotes from the data to strengthen the analysis and increase the transparency of the research.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Developing English Learning Activities in Primary Schools

Primary school English teachers employ a range of strategies to develop practical and engaging teaching approaches that cater to the diverse needs of young learners. One key strategy involves seeking inspiration from external sources, such as educational videos, online teaching platforms, and professional development workshops. These resources expose teachers to new techniques, classroom management strategies, and interactive learning activities that can be adapted to suit their specific classroom context (Widodo, 2018; Hawanti, 2014). Additionally, collaboration with peers from other schools plays a vital role in enhancing teaching practices. Through informal discussions or formal teacher networks, educators share experiences, lesson plans, and effective strategies, creating a supportive learning community. Teachers also often draw ideas from other subject areas, integrating cross-disciplinary methods to make English lessons more dynamic and meaningful. For instance, storytelling techniques used in language arts or visual aids from science can enrich English instruction. This continuous cycle of exploration, reflection, and adaptation allows teachers to refine their practices and better engage their students. By innovating based on real classroom challenges and external insights, teachers ensure that their instructional approaches remain relevant, creative, and responsive. Ultimately, these strategies support the creation of enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences that motivate students and foster a deeper understanding of the English language.

Teachers' Strategies for Designing Learning Activities in English Lesson Plans

Developing learning activities is a crucial part of the process of improving the quality of teaching, especially for primary school teachers who do not have a special background in English language education. Based on interview data, teachers show a high level of initiative to continue learning and adapting their methods to the needs of students. Some teachers take advantage of video platforms to see references to how to teach in a fun way, while others actively consult with more experienced teachers in this field. In this process, teachers face challenges such as choosing the right approach and compiling material that is easy for students to understand. However, these efforts show that they do not rely solely on formal training, but also look for creative and contextual solutions to develop effective and enjoyable learning activities. These strategies provide practical solutions and new knowledge for teachers on lesson delivery.

One of the teachers said, "I saw a reference on a video platform about how a teacher teaches their students in class. I applied some of these in class, from the use of language, the teaching method, and also the teaching ambiance in the classroom." (T1-Interview). This statement reflects that teachers do not just copy videos, but choose and adapt the right methods from the videos for their students. They think about how to speak, teach, and create a comfortable classroom atmosphere. This shows teachers' initiative and flexibility in learning and finding new ways to make learning more effective and enjoyable. As explained by Hawanti (2014), providing adequate teaching facilities and learning resources can substantially increase teacher motivation and the effectiveness of English language teaching in primary schools. The perspective of Stelma and Onat-Stelma (2010) in Turkey shows that teachers' understanding of effective teaching has evolved from simply managing student behavior to creating more student-centered learning. So, teachers also learn how to be English teachers by choosing the methods they choose, such as focusing on student activities in the classroom. Even though they do not have an English teacher background, these teachers are willing to develop themselves so that English learning activities remain of high quality.

In addition to looking for references from learning videos, there are also teachers who choose to learn directly from colleagues who are more experienced in the field of English teaching. Teacher 2, for example, explained that he often discusses and asks questions to his friend who does have an English education background. Teacher 2 said "This school has never had an English teacher who majored in English education, so I often ask my friend who teaches at another school. She is from English education. I asked her how to teach English in primary school, the approach, and how to make the material easy for students to understand. From there, I began to organize teaching and learning activities according to the needs of my class, especially in the final grade." (T2-Interview). This strategy was used because the school where she taught had never had a special English teacher, so consultation was one of the main ways to develop competence. This approach shows that teachers do not walk alone, but build knowledge through interaction with fellow teachers. Learning from the experience of others helps them understand more appropriate and contextual approaches according to the needs of the students. Even though they have limitations, they remain flexible and try to improve the quality of teaching. This finding reflects what Sulistiyo et al. (2019) highlighted in their research, that one of the main challenges in teaching English at the primary school level is the low quality of teacher preparation, mainly due to the lack of teachers with an English language education background. They also noted that the lack of curriculum guidelines and limited teaching resources make the situation worse.

The interview results show that teachers develop English learning in two main ways: learning from learning videos and consulting with more expert colleagues. Teacher 1 adapts the teaching method from the video to create a comfortable and effective classroom atmosphere, while Teacher 2 consults with his colleague who has an English education background to

understand the appropriate approach and delivery of the material. Both strategies reflect the initiative and flexibility of teachers in dealing with limitations, especially in schools that do not have specialized English teachers. The low teacher competence and lack of resources as the main challenges in English teaching in primary schools while emphasizing the importance of teacher collaboration and creativity in overcoming these obstacles.

Teachers' Challenges or Difficulties in Designing Learning Activities in English Lesson Plan

Designing learning activities in English lesson plans is not easy, especially for primary school teachers who do not have an English education background. One of the main challenges is to ensure that all students can be actively involved in the activities. Because students have different learning styles some prefer to look at pictures, listen to explanations, or move directly and often find it difficult to create activities that suit everyone. Some students are enthusiastic when playing, but others become unfocused. Another challenge that is often faced is allocating time well. If the explanation at the beginning is too long, the main part and the conclusion are rushed, so that students do not understand or do not have time to summarize the lesson. In addition, differences in student abilities also mean that teachers have to adjust learning activities so that everyone can follow, both those who understand the lesson quickly and those who need extra help. Teachers often have to adjust activities in the middle of the class immediately so that no one is left behind. These challenges show that designing English learning requires creativity, the ability to adapt, and good classroom management skills.

One of the teachers said, "Honestly, sometimes it's difficult to get all students interested and active in class. The problem is, every student is different. Some prefer to learn through pictures, some understand better if they listen, and some have to move first before they can understand. I am often confused about how to create activities that can attract all students, especially when learning English. Sometimes, I have tried using games, but some students become unfocused. So, I am still looking for ways to get all students involved. (T1-Interview). Teachers not only need to be creative, but they also need to understand the character of individual students. This shows that a one-method-fits-all approach is not enough, and teachers are still in the process of finding methods that are inclusive yet focused and purposeful. This is in line with the idea that although young students have a strong potential to learn English because of their natural enthusiasm, implicit learning ability, and talent for imitating sounds (Paradis, 2004; Johnstone, 2009), their learning success depends heavily on the teaching methods used. Therefore, as highlighted by Uztosun (2018), primary school English teachers must not only master the language itself, but also understand how children learn, manage the classroom effectively, and design engaging lesson plans.

In addition to the challenge of ensuring that all students are involved, teachers also face difficulties in managing time during the learning process. One teacher shared, "Managing time while teaching is a challenge in itself. For example, if I take too long to explain the material at the beginning, the main part of the material will be cut off, and in the end, the students will not have enough time to understand it. Many times, I don't even get to the end, even though they need to be able to summarize what they've learned. Sometimes, I panic too, especially if the students need more time to understand the concept. It's a dilemma. I want all the students to understand slowly, but time is running out." (T2-Interview). There is an inner pressure felt by teachers between providing maximum understanding and keeping up with time targets. This reflects the need for professional training on time management and more efficient teaching strategies that do not sacrifice students' comprehension. This situation also aligns with Hu (2006), who noted that one of the core challenges is the readiness of teachers particularly non-native speakers to adapt to more complex teaching methods. Moreover, as Little et al. (2019) highlighted in their study in Sri Lanka, the reality in classrooms often differs from the intended curriculum, where discrepancies between policy and practice can affect how learning time is used.

The results of the interviews show that teachers face two major challenges when teaching English in primary school, which are adjusting the teaching method to different learning needs and managing limited learning time. In order for all students to be able to participate actively, teachers need to prepare activities that are suitable for different learning styles. Some understand better through pictures, some through sound, and some have to move first before they can understand. However, preparing such activities is not always easy, especially if it is only done in one meeting. Sometimes, even if you use games or exciting activities, the results are still uneven. Some even become unfocused. This shows the importance of teachers being more sensitive, creative, and able to adapt teaching methods to the conditions of the students. In addition, managing time is also a challenge in itself. Teachers are often confused between giving a full explanation or ensuring that all material can be delivered in a short time. As a result, sometimes there are parts of the lesson that are missed or students do not fully understand. This problem is not only a technical issue, but also a lack of adequate training and support for teachers. Overall, these findings show that teachers need more targeted training so that they can teach in a variety of ways, use time efficiently, and remain flexible in dealing with different classroom conditions.

Implementing English Learning Activities in Primary Schools

The paragraph below explains the results of observations in two classes taught by two teachers. The researcher evaluated whether the teaching and learning process in the classroom was by the lesson plan that the teacher had made. The main objective of this observation was to determine the extent to which the lesson plan was implemented during teaching. In addition, the researcher also looked at whether there were differences between planning and implementation in the classroom, as well as how teachers addressed the various challenges that arose while teaching. Thus, the results of this observation provide a clearer picture of the effectiveness of lesson plans in achieving learning objectives in each class. Furthermore, it is explained in stages starting from Teachers, which is outlined based on the opening activity, the main activity, and the closing activity.

Opening Activities

At this stage, opening activities in learning have an essential role in creating a conducive and productive learning atmosphere. This process allows teachers to build closer interactions with students and helps prepare students mentally and emotionally before receiving learning materials. The steps taken in the introductory activities, such as greeting, checking attendance, leading prayers, and motivating various means, are the initial efforts to ensure students are in a state of readiness to learn. In addition, the introduction of learning objectives and initial ability tests also facilitate students' being more focused and understanding of the flow of activities they will undergo throughout the learning process. Let us see how the lesson plan corresponds with the teacher's preliminary activities in the classroom.

Based on the results of the observation, the opening activity went quite well even though not everything was according to the plan written in the lesson plan. The teacher managed to create a comfortable and pleasant atmosphere by greeting the students in a friendly manner so that they seemed more ready and enthusiastic to learn. This is in line with the opinion of He et al. (2011, p. 15) who state that the insights of teachers can be an inspiration for other teachers in professional development, and encourage teaching preparation that is not just a routine, but more meaningful. Although some activities such as clapping and singing were not carried out, the class atmosphere remained lively because the interaction between teachers and students felt warm and close. One of the students led the prayer, which shows that the teacher continues to teach character and spiritual values. The teacher also asked the students how they were doing, and from this, the students had the opportunity to practice their English speaking skills. Overall,

although there were some parts that did not go according to plan, this opening activity went smoothly and supported a positive learning atmosphere.

Main Activities

In this main activity, the teacher tries to introduce the use of the pronouns "my" and "your" to the students through various interactive activities. The primary purpose of this activity is to help students understand and use these pronouns in the context of self-introduction. However, evaluating the extent to which these activities are practical and whether the strategies used facilitate students' understanding is essential. This observation will assess how the teacher implemented the lesson plan, student engagement, and the outcome of this main activity.

Based on the results of the observation, the implementation of the core activities has not gone well. The teacher started by asking the students to observe the pictures, but some students seemed less enthusiastic, perhaps due to a lack of initial interest or understanding. When the teacher introduced the character Joshua and used the dialogues "My name is Joshua" and "Your name is ...", some students looked confused. When asked to come forward to give an example, they had difficulty remembering and pronouncing the sentences correctly. Even though the teacher wrote examples on the board and asked students to write their names in the book, many still had difficulty following the instructions. The shared reading activity was also not effective, as the students seemed passive. Although the teacher tried to teach the pronouns "I" and "you," many students still had difficulty understanding the concept, so the teaching method may need to be more effective. This condition reflects the findings of Egar, Sukmaningrum, and Musarokah (2015), as well as Jazadi (2000) and Lestari (2003), who state that generalist teachers tend to use traditional methods such as dictating and copying, which are less effective in actively building students' understanding.

Closing Activities

This chapter will explain the results of observations regarding closing activities in the classroom learning process, which are observed based on the teacher's implementation when ending the lesson. The researcher focused on the correspondence between the lesson plan made by the teacher and the practice implemented in the classroom. The closing activity ensures students understand the material taught, summarize important points, and prepare students for the next meeting. In this observation, the researcher also wanted to know the extent to which teachers were able to manage the closing activities well and how they overcame the challenges that arose during the process.

Based on the results of the observation, the teacher began the closing activity by asking students to create a resume of the important points from the material that had been studied directly or a simple resume. However, not all students were seen to be active in creating resumes, some needed special treatment. After that, the teacher and students tried to summarize the learning that had been done, although the resulting conclusion seemed more dominated by the teacher than the students. The homework assignment given by the teacher was delivered, but not all students took good notes. The teacher also conveyed the material to be studied at the next meeting, although some students did not pay attention to the instructions. Because first graders are still too young to understand many instructions. The closing activity was done by singing the national anthem, which was not done, but prayers and greetings were done together. Although most of the activities went according to plan, some students lacked focus on the teacher's instructions, especially when making resumes and recording homework, including not singing the national anthem. This finding shows that the teacher's understanding of the implementation of activities is not only the design in the learning plan that greatly influences the success of the activity itself, as stated by Penuel et al. (2007) that how teachers interpret and implement an activity has an important role in determining its effectiveness. So it doesn't feel

like it's necessary to design too formal a closing activity if some of the activities are not implemented properly.

Based on lesson observation, the opening, main, and closing activities combined successes and challenges. The teacher created a friendly atmosphere by greeting students and encouraging two-way communication in English, although some planned activities, such as clapping and singing, were not implemented. In the main activities, when the teacher introduced the pronouns "my" and "your," many students had difficulty understanding the concept, and their participation was limited, indicating the need for more customized teaching methods. Closing activities followed the plan, but some students had difficulty summarizing and recording homework, and the planned national song was not sung overall. However, the learning followed the lesson plan structure, and adjustments were needed to support student engagement and understanding better.

The learning process observed in Teacher 2's class demonstrates a generally effective lesson plan implementation despite a few challenges. The opening activities successfully set the tone for the lesson, with the teacher establishing a conducive environment, though some students were less responsive during the initial ability test. The core activities engaged students through interactive methods like singing and visual aids, which helped reinforce vocabulary learning, although some struggled with pronunciation and confidence. Finally, the closing activities effectively summarized the lesson and provided a clear structure for future learning, although more attention to student participation and focus is needed. The teaching methods were appropriate and aligned with the planned goals, but some adjustments could improve student engagement and understanding.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be seen that primary school teachers have a high level of initiative in developing and implementing English lesson plans that are interesting and appropriate to the needs of students. In developing lesson plans for English learning, they look for references from learning videos and discuss with peers to find approaches that are more creative and easy for children to understand. In their classroom practice, both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 have endeavored to create a conducive and enjoyable learning atmosphere through activities such as singing, the use of pictures, and direct interaction, although there are still some challenges such as time constraints, differences in students' learning styles, and difficulties in pronunciation and participation. Although the lesson plans that have been created provide clear guidance, their implementation still requires flexibility and adaptation to make learning more effective and equitable. This finding emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development training for teachers, especially in English language learning in primary schools, so that they are not only able to develop appropriate lesson plans but also have the skills to adaptively apply them in diverse classrooms so that the quality of English language learning at the primary school level can continue to be improved. Relevant parties in the education sector must pay more attention to the equitable distribution of professional teacher training, especially in creating lesson plans. So that even teachers who do not have an English education background can develop themselves in designing and implementing them well. The limitation of this study is that it only focused on 2 teachers. Suggestion for further researchers: can look at the perspectives of teachers from public and private schools with a larger number of participants than in this study.

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