

TEACHER CHALLENGES IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR VERY YOUNG LEARNERS AT RA (KINDERGARTEN) RIYADHUL QUR'AN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Rafidah Fitriana¹, Sujito²

UIN Raden Mas Said Suakarta, Indonesia ^{1,2}

Email: rafidah.254081002@mhs.uinsaid.ac.id¹, sujito.team@gmail.com²

Informasi	Abstract
Volume : 3 Nomor : 6 Bulan : Juni Tahun : 2026 E-ISSN : 3062-9624	<p><i>This study examines the challenges faced by teacher in teaching English to very young children (TEVYL) in Indonesia, emphasizing the unique characteristics of this age group. To effectively engage young learners, educators must use interactive methods such as games, storytelling, and songs, which align with Vygotsky and Piaget's theories of language acquisition through play and environmental interactions. However, teachers often struggle with choosing the right teaching method, as significant challenges arise, including inadequate training, lack of resources, and classroom density. This research used qualitative research, the number and type of approaches, and the design used a phenomenology, so the researcher describes an individual's life experiences of a phenomenon as described by the teacher as a participant. This study underscores the importance of accommodating a variety of learning styles, visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, to create a multisensory learning environment that suits each child's unique preferences. The research also highlights the urgent need for improved curricula and better teacher training to build teaching effectiveness in early English education. In addition, teachers should foster an atmosphere that supports and encourages self-confidence and participation among very young learners, as their natural tendency to engage and experiment with language is essential for effective learning. The findings suggest a critical need for collaboration between teachers and governments to develop optimal teaching strategies and resources, in order to ensure that early childhood children receive a strong foundation in English language skills during their developmental years.</i></p> <p>Keyword: TEVYL, Teacher Challenges, RA (Kindergarten), Phenomenology</p>

A. INTRODUCTION

Globalization is making a change for language centers to design courses for children, to provide some courses, and formal schooling. For many years, teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL) has been happening in Indonesia. And right now, teaching starts from pre-school/kindergarten to elementary school. The Teaching English for Very Young Learners (TEVYL) is started from 3-6 years old, also called preschool. (Imaniah, 2017). Therefore, TEVYL is children in preschool at 3-6 years old.

Generally, TEVYL and TEYL is very special and unique activities, because when teaching them must use engaging tools, such as games, storytelling, songs and also good facilities to attract interest. (Pebriantini et.al. 2024). Variations in children's language acquisition are influenced by interactions with their environment. This aligns with Vygotsky's theory that children actively construct their language communication through interactions with their environment. This allows them to grasp the meaning of sentences and process grammar. By the age of four, they are able to use their language appropriately in appropriate environments, meaning they have become good communicators. (Alenezi, 2022). Similar to Vygotsky, Piaget, sensory experiences, and active play are the most effective and measurable stages in children's learning. Therefore, activities that stimulate creativity, interaction, and exploration are essential. (Astuti, 2024). The theories of Vygotsky and Piaget focus on children and their development.

However, with this, of course, teachers face various challenges. The complexity in TEVYL is what method is appropriate to use. In TEVYL, it cannot be done carelessly and must be done carefully, because it will have a profound impact. (Romadhon, 2024). Over up 80% teachers stated that teaching young learners is more challenging than teaching adults (Gunawan, 2025). For teachers who teach young children, English presents challenges and complexities, so incorporating English into the curriculum will have a significant impact. However, in EFL, English teachers in early childhood schools do not yet have optimal skills (Romadhon, 2024). The complex challenges faced by EFL teachers are also caused by the curriculum used, teachers and the government must work together to make changes and updates (Sebayang et.al., 2025). The challenges faced also relate to their cognitive, literacy, social, and emotional aspects. Young learners tend to have vivid imaginations and are very interested in new things. This is also what distinguishes teaching young learners from teaching adult learners (Yildiz et.al., 2024).

Previous studies have examined the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English in TEFL and TEYL. This study aims to investigate the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English to very young learners (TEVYL) under the age of 7. This study highlights the challenges faced by teacher in RA Riyadhul Qur'an in teaching English with students of various characteristics.

Literature Review

Characteristics of Very Young Learners

Based on Maulana (2025), these qualities emphasize their inherent skill in acquiring languages and provide essential guidance for educators in the classroom:

- a. **Emphasizing Understanding:** Younger students concentrate on grasping the overall message initially, eagerly taking in vocabulary and linking terms to concepts. This emphasis on understanding lays a solid groundwork for their language comprehension.
- b. **Learning Through Experience:** Young learners are skilled at picking up new languages through real-life experiences and interactions. They absorb vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation naturally while engaging in everyday activities, prioritizing fun exploration over rote memorization. This method facilitates an organic and enjoyable way to learn a language.
- c. **Expanding on Known Information:** The minds of young learners are primed to assimilate new knowledge, using their existing language skills to establish a foundation for the new language by tying it to their first language. This foundational linguistic understanding acts as a launchpad for additional language learning.
- d. **Fearless Experimentation:** Young learners are not deterred by making mistakes; they freely play around with new vocabulary and sounds, which speeds up their acquisition of the language. Their lack of self-consciousness enables them to take chances and view mistakes as a normal part of the learning journey.
- e. **Flourishing in Imaginative Settings:** Young learners thrive in creative atmospheres, relishing activities like games and storytelling. This playful and interactive method of learning a language promotes enthusiasm and enjoyment.

Individual students in foreign language courses vary significantly in numerous aspects at all stages of learning. Writers and scholars focused on learning preferences have offered various methods to examine and articulate the distinctions among learners, and each approach is beneficial. Learners can be identified as visual, auditory, or kinesthetic; they might also be categorized as holistic or linear thinkers. Some researchers position learners along a spectrum ranging from concrete to abstract or from sequential to random processing. The key takeaway from this information is the understanding that nearly every student is different from their instructors and from one another in multiple respects.

Juliari et.al. (2025) defined clearly, such as:

1. Visual Learning Style

Children who have a preference for visual learning grasp information more effectively through what they see. They usually focus intently on their instructors, find it easier to comprehend lessons that utilize images, and enjoy reading alone instead of being read to. To support English learning for visual learners, incorporating pictures, videos, and other visual resources is beneficial.

2. Auditory Learning Style

Young learners with an auditory learning preference absorb information better when they hear it. They express excitement while listening to explanations from teachers, actively participate in conversations, and often silently mouth the words while reading. Suitable teaching techniques for these learners include using songs, narratives, and group discussions.

3. Kinesthetic Learning Style

Children who prefer kinesthetic learning excel through hands-on activities and movement. They typically find it challenging to remain seated for extended periods, frequently tap their pens, and grasp concepts more effectively when learning is paired with physical engagement or action. The Total Physical Response (TPR) approach works particularly well for kinesthetic learners, as it incorporates movement into their education. To cater to all three learning styles, teachers should implement a multi-sensory strategy that blends various educational techniques. The combined use of songs, actions, and visual tools can enhance English language learning for children with diverse learning preferences.

The Importance of Teaching English for Very Young Learners

The most sensitive period for language in a person's life is between the ages of 2 and 7. During this period, all aspects of language must be introduced to children before this sensitive period ends. English language education for early childhood requires approaches and learning methods that are appropriate to the characteristics of child development. English language learning for early childhood should be done gradually and limited to the introduction of basics. Young children are less self-conscious about making mistakes, allowing them to engage more freely in language practice, which can lead to native-like proficiency over time. They will easily remember simple words first. One of the main advantages of teaching English to young children is their natural ability to absorb language, which is often associated with lower levels of inhibition and enthusiasm for learning. Not only that, English language education for young children requires appropriate methods to improve language comprehension and usage (Juliari et al., 2025).

The concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) according to Shulman plays a very important role here, because it links knowledge of the subject with teaching methods that make the material easier to understand and more interesting. This idea has evolved, as recent studies highlight the importance of practical skills alongside conceptual understanding. For example, effective teaching methods in TEVYL require an understanding of child-centered approaches and the ability to incorporate them into lessons to support cognitive and language development. Communication abilities encompass the capacity to offer helpful feedback and address personal requirements. This element holds special significance in TEVYL, where young learners gain from affirmative acknowledgment and straightforward, uplifting reactions to their attempts. Teachers' effective communication can further boost students' confidence and involvement, both crucial components in the process of learning a language. Consequently, educators should excel in the skill of delivering encouraging and detailed feedback, guiding young learners to recognize their development and identify where they can improve (Jumrah et al., 2024).

The constructivist method encourages strategies focused on students that align with these developmental principles. Activities such as storytelling, music, and play are frequently mentioned as successful ways to involve children in significant language interaction. Games foster teamwork, inspire learners, and provide chances for language use in context, enabling moments for unplanned learning (Astuti et.al., 2025).

For young learner, singing is an enjoyable pastime. Songs are certainly an entertaining method that can aid learners in acquiring a new language. The music doesn't rush them into learning the language all at once; instead, it allows them to take their time until they feel prepared. Using English lyrics can be a helpful strategy for introducing vocabulary that aids in solving problems. This method boosts students' enthusiasm, particularly in fostering an enjoyable learning atmosphere. Singing stands out as one of the creative educational strategies and tools for teaching English to young learners. When students feel more excited and at ease talking about words, their self-assurance and curiosity in learning notably grow, making it simpler for them to retain vocabulary. One strong justification for incorporating songs in the classroom is that they are one of the most effective means of teaching a foreign language. Consequently, songs can seamlessly and naturally support the development of the four essential skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking within the language instruction. Furthermore, another advantage of including music and songs in lessons is the diversity it

adds, breaking the monotony and boosting students' involvement and interest (Putri et.al., 2023).

Starting English learning early can help children grow smarter, get along better with others, and feel more confident, which will help them succeed in the world that is becoming more connected and global (Wahab, 2025).

Teaching English for Very Young Learners (TEVYL) in Indonesia

According to Aminah et.al. (2023), in the Minister of Education and Culture's Decree Number 0487/4/1992, Chapter VIII mentions that schools may incorporate various fundamental subjects into their curriculum as long as they align with the objectives of national education. Subsequently, the Minister of Education and Culture's Decree Number 060/U/1993 reinforced this guideline on February 25, 1993. This directive focuses on introducing English language courses as local content in elementary schools starting from the fourth grade. Consequently, in Indonesia, English language classes in elementary education or early childhood development are regarded as local content subjects that should enhance the overall value of the country's educational aims. This initiative will influence the evolution of English language instruction.

According to Aminah et.al. (2023). Several important elements that affect how students learn and teach include various external and internal aspects, such as environmental, familial, and community influences. Additionally, the presence of local and international languages does not impact the learning experience of students. The advancement of English teaching can be regarded as Indonesia's initiative to adapt to and align with global trends through the English language. Firstly, data indicates that individuals who are not native speakers have become the primary users of English. Secondly, there is a growing recognition of English being utilized in a diverse language setting. This, in turn, promotes effective communication. Lastly, the focus on conveying meaning is deemed more vital than adhering strictly to grammatical rules or achieving native-like pronunciation. This suggests that regardless of the established grammar and pronunciation guidelines, English has evolved into a common means of communication for the majority of non-native speakers. However, numerous private educational institutions have incorporated English into their kindergarten curriculum, and a variety of engaging English courses can be found, even though some instructors lack sufficient qualifications to teach the language. According to Article 33 of the National Education System Law No. 20/2003, which permits the inclusion of regional and foreign languages in the early stages of education, young learners can start acquiring English skills earlier without

conflicting with the national education requirements. The effects of globalization have fostered a perception that English is essential because of its widespread use. Changes in the English language policies within elementary education have been influenced by the ideas of policymakers. The inclusion of English as a subject in elementary schools takes into account linguistic, economic, social, and political factors. Ultimately, this has resulted in a significant demand for English, yet the capacity to meet that demand remains low. This lack of capacity arises from several issues, including the size of classes, the level of teacher professionalism, and the state of infrastructure in elementary schools. The government should enhance the availability of educational materials, like English textbooks, and ensure that students pursuing English education are adequately prepared to teach in higher education and secondary schools in the future. In summary, English education programs at universities and the decisions made by policymakers need to address these challenges.

Apriani et al. (2025) stated that the necessity of this research grows due to the significance of mastering foreign languages as an essential ability for the youth in today's globalized world. It is expected that with effective teaching methods from educators, students will not only grasp and utilize new words but also enhance their overall communication abilities, which will contribute to the enhancement of the national education system's quality. This sense of urgency has been acknowledged by the government positively. Kemendikbudristek revealed an important decision:

"English language subjects in elementary schools, madrasah ibtidaiyah, or other equivalent forms will become elective subjects that can be offered based on the readiness of the Educational Unit until the 2026/2027 academic year and will transition to mandatory subjects in the 2027/2028 academic year"

Based on Rahayu et.al. (2025) the teachers generally valued early exposure to English and regarded it as beneficial for children's cognitive, communicative, and future academic development.

The Challenges in Teaching English for Very Young Learners (TEVYL)

Yildiz et.al. (2024) stated that very young learners (VYL) possess high energy levels but struggle with maintaining focus, and they require more physical activity compared to young learners. These traits of VYL can create challenges for teachers instructing in English, yet there is a lack of research dedicated to exploring the difficulties educators encounter with this demographic. In Indonesia, English teachers face obstacles such as a lack of motivation, insufficient time and resources for teaching, inadequate materials, and overcrowded

classrooms. Additionally, teachers may struggle with planning lessons and often lack adequate training. Furthermore, the research revealed that an unhelpful learning environment is also a significant challenge for teaching English to VYL. The hurdles teachers encounter in kindergartens, like large class sizes, resource scarcity, time constraints, students' readiness for school, academic curricula, and minimal parental engagement, have been identified as pressing issues. The difficulties these educators encounter can also differ based on various factors, particularly those associated with the teachers themselves, such as their gender and years of teaching experience. For instance, gender has been recognized as an important factor in this context. In foreign language education, female educators tend to have a more favorable outlook compared to their male counterparts, and they are generally more effective in utilizing teaching strategies, which may result in fewer professional challenges for them. In addition to gender, teaching experience plays a crucial role as it can affect the challenges faced by teachers instructing English to young or very young students. Nevertheless, the issues that arise in classrooms for younger students remain consistent regardless of the teaching experience of the educators.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research used qualitative research, the number and type of approaches. Qualitative research is especially useful when researchers do not know the important variables that need to be researched. This type of approach may be necessary because the topic is new, the subject has not been studied with a particular sample or group of people, and the existing theories do not apply to the particular sample or group being studied.. Phenomenological research is a design of inquiry derived from philosophy and psychology in which researchers describe an individual's life experiences of a phenomenon as described by participants. This description culminates in the essence of the experiences of several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. These designs have a strong philosophical foundation and usually involve interviews (Cresswell, 2018).

The technique collecting the data use an interview and observation. Semi-structured interviews enable researchers to collect rich stories while also allowing them to explore particular topics further.

This approach was selected to understand the experiences of participants in teaching English and how they address different obstacles. Observing the classroom supports the interview process, offering a direct perspective on how educators apply their techniques in

practice Information was examined through thematic analysis. This approach is commonly employed in qualitative studies, appreciated for its adaptability in recognizing trends and motifs within the data. These motifs offer important understanding regarding the tactics utilized by participants to tackle the difficulties of teaching English to young children. (Febriantini et.al., 2024).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings in research with an interview with an English teacher at RA Riyadhul Quran regarding the challenges and obstacles faced, namely:

1. English teachers do not have an English language education background

“Because my basic education is not in English.”

Ms. R experienced challenges because the basis of his English teaching was not much. With an unfavorable educational background, you often experience errors in understanding and pronouncing words in English.

2. Difficulty in searching for material

“Because there is no basis, I had difficulty finding the right material.”

According to Ms. R, he had difficulty finding the right material for young learners. Moreover, for young learners, the choice of material cannot be haphazard; it must be adjusted to the context and age.

3. Differences in young learner learning styles

“Children's learning styles are different; some are visual, kinesthetic, some are auditory, sometimes they don't focus, some are interested, and some feel monotonous.”

Various kinds of learning styles for children, according to Ms. R made it difficult for him to adjust to teaching. Often, young learners are unfocused and feel monotonous

4. English learning only at school

“Because English is not a commonly spoken language around us, they only get English teaching at school”

Ms. R finds it difficult because young learners only learn English at school, because parents don't repeat these lessons at home.

5. Difficulty in teaching vocabulary and pronunciation

“Because RA also learns other languages, sometimes children return to Arabic or Javanese”

At RA, language teaching is not only English, but also Javanese and Arabic. This makes students confused and often err in their vocabulary and pronunciation

6. Minimum in learning media

“In terms of facilities and media, it is still limited, while what children teach, so new innovations are needed”

Ms. R experiences challenges in limited learning facilities and media. Even though it is a support when studying.

Discussions

Teachers' challenges in teaching English, especially at the young or most basic level, have definitely arisen. What teachers experience also varies because the characteristics of children are actually different. Maulana (2025) defines and emphasizes that young learners have innate abilities that must be honed. However, this of course poses challenges for English teachers, namely

1. Non major teachers

According to Romadhon (2024) teachers with a background in English education will experience difficulties and challenges in teaching vocabulary. Often this causes misunderstandings in speaking. Apart from that, in pronunciation, errors often occur that continue to occur even to students. This is what creates challenges and obstacles to English language teaching.

2. Difficulty in selecting, searching, and creating materials

According to Article 33 of the National Education System Law no. 20/2003, which permits the inclusion of regional and foreign languages in the early stages of education, young learners can start acquiring English skills earlier without conflict with the national education requirements English can be taught to very young learners. Materials can also be adjusted to suit needs and capacity. On PCK based on Shulman the material created must be easier so that it can be easily understood. However, it needs to be understood if the government provides textbooks that are currently easy to access and learn (Aminah et.al. 2023).

3. Differences in student learning styles

Juliari et.al. explains that there are three learning styles for children, namely visual, auditory and kinesthetic. With these differences in learning styles, teachers must be able to continue to adapt so that the material can be accepted by students. This is a challenge because learning styles vary and students' understanding targets must be achieved. Adjusting teachers to the rest with differences in learning styles is very likely to confuse teachers.

4. English learning only at school

The next teacher challenge arises because the learning is only carried out in one direction by teachers at school and is not assisted by parents when students are at home. Romadhon (2024) explains that English language skills can decrease due to lack of support and practice at home. Children spend more time at home than at school, so if English is not repeated by parents or people in the home environment, children will quickly forget. This is a challenge for teachers because they have to repeat the material taught previously, which takes up a lot of time.

5. Difficulty in memorizing vocabulary and in pronunciation

According to Maulana (2025) very young learners should be emphasized in vocabulary. However, in this case children find it difficult because they don't just learn one language. Then for pronunciation because the learner is still very young there is difficulty in pronouncing words.

6. Limited supporting facilities and learning media

According to Pebriantini (2025) TEVYL and TEYL are very special and unique activities, because when teaching them you have to use interesting tools, such as games, storytelling, songs, and also good facilities to attract their interest. Limited and minimal media is a challenge, while children will easily be attracted to something unique and new. This is a challenge for teachers because it is difficult for teachers to innovate.

D. CONCLUSION

In summary, the challenges faced by English teachers at RA Riyadhul Quran highlights the complexities of teaching a foreign language to young learners, particularly when educators lack a formal background in English, struggle with material selection, and content with diverse learning styles. Addressing these obstacles is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of English language instruction and foster a supportive learning environment that extends beyond the classroom.

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