# Enhancing English teaching in elementary schools: A sociocultural perspectives of non-English major teachers' experiences

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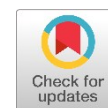
ABSTRACT

English language has been introduced and taught to Indonesian students from elementary to higher education. In the context of Indonesian elementary education, the teaching of English often falls to homeroom teachers who lack formal qualifications in the language. This gap in teacher qualifications poses challenges for effective English instruction at the classroom level, particularly for homeroom teachers assigned to teach the subject. This study explores the challenges and strategies of non-English major teachers in teaching English in Indonesian elementary schools using Sociocultural Theory framework. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews with six homeroom teachers from a public elementary school in Yogyakarta who teach English without formal language training. The findings reveal key challenges related to linguistic limitations, pedagogical constraints, and classroom management. In response, teachers employed self-directed and collaborative strategies to improve their teaching competence. These findings highlight the need for targeted support, including professional development programs and curriculum adjustments, to equip non-English major teachers with the competencies required to deliver effective English instruction.

1. Introduction

English has become a globally dominant language, spoken by hundreds of million worldwide and serving as an official language in numerous countries (Ilyosovna, 2020). Since English is a worldwide language, it is crucial that everyone learn it. Proficiency in English is essential for personal and professional success in today's interconnected world (Abduganieva et al., 2023). This is because almost all aspects of life today use English, especially in the world of education. According to Rao (2019), English which is widespread used in education, from textbooks to academic research, underscores its critical role in learning and knowledge acquisition.

With the growing importance of English, English proficiency in Indonesia remains an unresolved challenge. Recognizing this, the Indonesian government recently issued a new policy regarding English lesson for elementary school students. According to Permendikbudristek No. 12 of (2024) which regulates the curriculum for elementary such as *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, or other forms of

equivalent, it is stated that English is an elective subject that can be taken until the 2026/2027 school year, contingent on school readiness. However, starting in the 2027/2028 school year, English will become a compulsory subject. This policy shift underscores the critical need for well-trained English teachers in elementary schools to effectively equip students with the language skills necessary for success in a globalized world.

English language education in elementary school serves for several reasons. It equips students with valuable skills for future academic success and enhances their competitiveness in the global job market (Putranti & Ambawani, 2019). Moreover, young learners are highly receptive to language acquisition, making early language learning more effective (Setiyadi, 2020). Therefore, learning other languages at a young age will be more advantageous. However, effective English teaching at this level necessitates qualified and professional educators.

Improving teachers' qualities, including English teachers in elementary schools, is paramount for student success. According to Alzeebaree and Zebari (2021), effective teachers possess key qualities, including student-centered approaches, passion for teaching, subject expertise, fairness, good communication skills, and strong classroom management skills. This way, the ability of English teachers to manage the class is needed to cooperatively manage time, space, resources, and student roles and behaviors. Moreover, professional English teachers must have special qualifications, including degrees, certification, and relevant pedagogical expertise (Sya & Helmanto, 2020). Thus, having a professional English teacher who can manage the class well will create successful English teaching and learning.

Unfortunately, many elementary schools in Indonesia still face a shortage of qualified English teachers. In fact, English subject is often taught by non-English major teachers, typically homeroom teachers. According to Zein (2019), most English instruction at the primary school level is delivered by teachers who lack sufficient ability to teach English because they are not English graduates. Non-English major teachers clearly do not meet the standards of professional English teachers. Many of these teachers often lack the necessary skills and knowledge to teach English effectively which results in challenges for non-English major teachers to provide qualified English language education as they do not have a comprehensive background in English language teaching (Falah et al., 2024). This situation raises concerns about the quality of English education as effective teaching requires in-depth knowledge of the English language and strong pedagogical skills. The phenomenon in which non-English major teachers find challenges in teaching English is caused by the English curriculum changes. According to Oktavia et al., (2023), the curriculum that regulates the existence of English subjects often changes. As a result, many schools assume that English is often perceived as less essential, leading schools to assign it to homeroom teachers without specialized training.

Teaching English to young learners presents significant challenges, particularly for teachers who are not English majors. According to Romadhon et al. (2024), limited English proficiency among these teachers leads to several difficulties, including pronunciation issues, vocabulary limitations, and mother tongue fossilization. This aligns with the findings of Nagauleng et al. (2021), who noted that teachers often struggle with pronouncing and expressing English words due to a lack of formal university training in the language. Non-English major teachers also face vocabulary limitations, a challenge highlighted in numerous studies (Millán Librado & Basurto Santos, 2020; Nafissi & Shafiee, 2020). Yussof and Sun (2020) further emphasize that teachers must match their instruction to the students' level of understanding and learning needs. Febrianto (2021) adds that teachers whose mother tongues are Javanese or Indonesian often experience interlingual transfer, which affects their ability to produce accurate English vowel sounds. Moreover, teachers without a relevant educational background often lack confidence, which is evident in their lesson planning, activity design, responses to student questions, and ability to engage students (Aina & Olanipekun, 2015). Consequently, non-English major teachers are likely to encounter these difficulties due to their limited English language skills, leading to confusion when teaching English to their students.

Other difficulties when teaching English as a foreign language to young learners as mentioned by Pertiwi et al., (2020) include class size and different characteristics of the students. This is in line with study by Cahyati et al., (2019) who asserted that there are some teachers in elementary schools who have difficulties in managing their classes. In one class there are 35-40 students who are noisy, busy with their own activities, and pay less attention. Thus, teaching English to elementary students need

to be planned carefully. Sinaga and Oktaviani (2020) stated that teaching English to students in elementary schools must be carefully planned to take into account their individual characteristics.

Given the numerous challenges that non-English major teachers face when teaching English, it is crucial for them to find effective teaching strategies in the classroom. These strategies include participating in professional development programs to enhance their pedagogical skills and knowledge. According to Putri and Rani (2022), teachers need to possess adequate and professional knowledge relevant to the subjects they teach. Non-English major teachers can also seek guidance and support from colleagues through peer consultation (Cuevas, 2024). Utilizing technology, such as watching online teaching tutorials and using learning applications, can be beneficial, too. Panagiotidis et al. (2023) highlight that technology enables teachers to access various English learning applications and online resources. Additionally, employing interactive language learning media can aid English teachers in delivering material effectively. Santika et al. (2023) found that using interactive media, such as flashcards and posters, significantly impacts students' language development. Finally, grouping students such as pair work or a small group work can be an effective strategy for managing large classes when teaching foreign language such as English (Marzulina, 2022). Guided by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, this study aims to investigate the challenges and coping strategies of non-English major teachers in teaching English in public elementary schools in Yogyakarta.

1.1. Sociocultural Theory Framework

This research utilizes Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (2012) as its theoretical framework. Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction, cultural tools, and mediated learning in the development of language skills. According to Vygotsky, learning occurs through interactions with more knowledgeable others, and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) represents the difference between what learners can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance (2012).

Vygotsky believed that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. He argued that learning is inherently a social process, where interactions with teachers, peers, and other knowledgeable individuals facilitate cognitive development. This principle is particularly relevant for non-English major teachers, as collaborative learning and peer support can help them overcome language teaching challenges.

Additionally, Vygotsky emphasized the use of cultural tools, such as language, symbols, and artifacts, in the learning process. These tools mediate cognitive activities and are essential for the development of higher mental functions. For non-English major teachers, utilizing cultural tools like educational technology and interactive media can enhance their teaching effectiveness. The ZPD is a core concept in Vygotsky's theory, referring to the gap between what learners can do on their own and what they can achieve with assistance. Effective teaching occurs within this zone, where guidance and support from more knowledgeable others enable learners to reach higher levels of understanding. Non-English major teachers can benefit from professional development and mentorship to operate within their ZPD and improve their teaching skills.

Scaffolding involves providing temporary support to learners as they develop new skills or knowledge. This support is gradually removed as learners become more proficient. For non-English major teachers, scaffolding can include structured lesson plans, teaching aids, and continuous feedback from experienced educators.

This framework is particularly suitable for this study because it highlights the role of social interactions and cultural tools in overcoming the challenges faced by non-English major teachers. By applying social interactions and cultural tools, teachers can enhance their English teaching skills and provide more effective instruction. For instance, peer consultation, professional development programs, and the use of technology can serve as cultural tools that facilitate learning and teaching improvement.

1.2. Review of Previous Research

Several previous studies were conducted to find out the challenges and strategies that non-English teachers face when teaching English. According to Cuevas (2024), non-major English teachers faced moderate challenges in lesson planning but effectively utilized resources such as online tutorials, peer observations, and student assessments to overcome them, demonstrating a strong commitment to professional growth. Meanwhile, Romadhon et al., (2024) found that teachers faced challenges in

pronunciation, vocabulary, and mother tongue fossilization. However, although there have been many previous studies on non-English teachers' experiences in teaching English in several educational institutions and at various levels, there is still a lack of research focusing on public primary schools in Yogyakarta, and more specifically, the use of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory as the analyses tool offers a robust framework for understanding and addressing non-English major teachers challenges and strategies in teaching English in elementary school contexts. Thus, this study aims to fill this gap by formulating two research questions (1) What are the challenges faced by non-English major teachers in teaching English to primary school students? (2) What strategies do non-English major teachers apply in teaching English in the classroom?

2. Method

The study aims to explore the experiences of non-English major teachers regarding the challenges and strategies they employ when teaching English to elementary school students. A qualitative approach was adopted for this research, specifically using a descriptive qualitative design to capture the detailed experiences of these teachers. According to Merriam (1998), descriptive qualitative research provides a comprehensive and nuanced description of specific experiences encountered by individuals or groups. By utilizing this design, the researchers hope to gain broader and deeper insights.

This study involved six homeroom teachers from public elementary schools in Yogyakarta, who were selected through convenience sampling. Convenience sampling refers to selecting a research population that is easily accessible to the researchers for data collection (Rahi, 2017, as cited in Golzar et al., 2022). Participants were identified through professional engagement during an internship program, and were selected based on their experience teaching English without formal English training. These six teachers, who taught English without having a formal background in the language, were included in the study. Although limited in number, the six participants were sufficient to provide data saturation for a small-scale descriptive qualitative study, allowing for thematic depth and insight into shared experiences. To ensure participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in the findings, such as Luna, Scarlett, Willow, Nova, Jasper, and Rain. The table below provides details of the participant data:

Table 1. Participants' Data

Name (Code)	Gender	Age	Roles	Educational Background
T1	Female	54	Homeroom teacher of grade 1	Bachelor of elementary education
T2	Female	40	Homeroom teacher of grade 2	Bachelor of elementary education
T3	Female	41	Homeroom teacher of grade 3	Bachelor of elementary education
T4	Female	26	Homeroom teacher of grade 4	Bachelor of elementary education
T5	Male	29	Homeroom teacher of grade 5	Bachelor of elementary education
T6	Female	26	Homeroom teacher of grade 6	Bachelor of elementary education

The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection in which an interview guide with a list of questions was prepared to ensure the interviews stayed on track. This approach also allowed the researchers to ask follow-up questions to gather additional in-depth information. After collecting the interview data, the researchers transcribed the interviews, performed member checking, coded the data, and analysed the information. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns in the data. Initial codes were generated inductively from the transcripts, and then grouped into broader themes aligned with the research questions." To maintain the trustworthiness of the study, member checking was established.

3. Finding and Discussion

3.1. Findings

Based on the results of the study, there are twelve findings that the researchers found in responding to the first and second research questions, and these findings are explained and discussed in detail below.

1)   Challenges faced by non-English major teachers in teaching English

The findings revealed six challenges faced by non-English major teachers in teaching English to elementary school students. The challenges included problems with 1) pronunciation, 2) lack of vocabulary, 3) mother tongue interferences, 4) limited teaching skills, 5) large class size, and 6) diverse students' characteristics. Each challenge is presented in the following paragraphs.

Problems with Pronunciation. The study found that pronunciation was a significant challenge for all participating teachers. This is due to their limited exposure to English outside of their teaching duties, leading to insecurity and uncertainty about their own pronunciation accuracy. Some teachers expressed concerns about their pronunciation affecting student learning and their own professional image. One of the participants, Scarlett mentioned "…….especially I have the most difficulty with pronunciation even though I teach grade 2, but the pronunciation should be correct because it is basic for students.". Similarly, Jasper stated "When it comes to pronunciation, I sometimes feel insecure, afraid that my pronunciations will sound bad to other teachers when I feel that there are some vocabulary words that I could potentially make mistakes with.". Both teachers feel indifferent to the limitations or mistakes that may occur. As stated by Willow "I really have difficulty pronouncing English words, so sometimes I teach them as best I can. I don't care whether other people will hear it funny or bad, the important thing is that I still teach it". The difficulty experienced by these teachers in terms of pronunciation is caused by their lack of using English in their everyday life. Luna echoed this concern, attributing her difficulty to minimal English usage in daily life: "….I'm not an expert in English. I rarely speak English words in my daily life. So, I need to learn to give it to the children."

Lack of Vocabulary. The lack of vocabulary is also experienced by many participants, making them face difficulties when teaching. Willow mentioned "I have difficulties such as my vocabulary mastery is limited". Nova added, "……. due to my limited mastery of English vocabulary, the children only learn the vocabulary in the textbook, I cannot explore English vocabulary more widely". Nova said that her lack of vocabulary affected how she taught.

Indeed, limited vocabulary posed a significant challenge for non-English major teachers. These participants reported difficulties in translating English words, often feeling insecure about their own vocabulary mastery. This lack of vocabulary hindered their ability to effectively explain concepts, choose appropriate vocabulary for student levels, and respond to student questions beyond the textbook material. Nova said, "Due to my limited vocabulary, sometimes there are words that I don't know the meaning of when my students ask questions outside the textbook". Jasper added "For vocabulary selection, I have difficulty because I don't have much English vocabulary, so I am confused about which vocabulary is suitable for my students' level".

Mother Tongue Interferences. The study revealed that mother tongue interference, particularly from Javanese, presented a significant challenge for the teachers. Participants reported difficulties in suppressing their native language accents, leading to incorrect pronunciation and intonation in English. One of the participants, Nova stated, "When I speak Indonesian, my Javanese accent comes through, and even more so in English". Similarly, Willow stated that she often gets carried away with her Javanese affixes when she spoke English. She said, "Because I'm from Java, it usually comes with the words "*to*". Well, it must have been automatically carried out because of the habit". Often, this mother tongue interference affected these teachers' pronunciation. Jasper said "Obviously, when my Javanese accent is carried over, my English pronunciation will also be disrupted". This phenomenon, commonly observed among Indonesian speakers, is attributed to the strong influence of their native language on their English pronunciation, as evidenced by the interference of Javanese vowel sounds and affixes in their English speech.

Inadequate Teaching Skills. Inadequate teaching skills was the biggest obstacle experienced by all participants. This happened because they did not get knowledge about the basic principles of teaching English to young learners. According to Willow, her major greatly influences the way she teaches. She said, "In my opinion, it [my major background] has a big influence, so I only teach based on the [English] textbooks provided by the school; there are no other books, and I give as much as I can". Feeling the same way, Scarlett said "I teach only according to what is in the book, because I was not taught in college about the principles of teaching English". Rain added "The major [subject] certainly has an influence, so we don't have knowledge about the basics of teaching English… . He added, "When there are questions from students, I have difficulty in really explaining, for example, why a sentence has this formula. We just answer yes because that's how we've learned it since the

beginning". Until now, most English teachers in Indonesia only rely on the materials and activities in textbooks, due to their limited knowledge". Nova mentioned "I'm confused about how to teach the children properly, like where to start, whether the students are capable of this material or not, which one should be taught first". Similarly, Luna said, "I am confused about how to design good and correct English learning for young learners because first grade reading and writing Indonesian is still difficult, let alone learning English is even more difficult". Inadequate teaching skills also led to another problem in which some participants had difficulties in answering students' questions. As Jasper said, "Sometimes, I also find it difficult to explain when there are critical students such as asking what the difference is between see, watch, and look". In addition, the participants also experience difficulty to build English language habits between teachers and students. This affect the students motivation to learn English. Jasper said:

> "My biggest obstacle is getting students used to speaking English in daily conversations or especially in the classroom such as simple things like greetings, instructions in class, conversations with students or just permission to go to the bathroom. […] it's because my English skills are limited, so it's hard for me to do those things".

The problem experienced by Jasper affects the students' motivation to learn English. He stated,

> "Of course, it [the problem] has an impact, especially in increasing students' motivation to learn English, because I believe that students will be enthusiastic and motivated if the teacher also equips them with vocabulary that they can apply every day".

This situation resulted in the participants' feeling of being dissatisfied with English teaching, and this is stated by Jasper, "[…], I am not satisfied [with my English teaching] at all".

Big Class Size. Large class sizes pose a challenge for non-English major teachers, causing difficulties to manage student behavior, maintaining classroom order, and providing individualized attention. This challenge is compounded by the teachers' limited English language skills, making it difficult to effectively engage and differentiate instruction for all students in a large group environment. One of the teachers, Nova said, "The class with so many students make it more difficult for me to teach, especially English". Similarly, Scarlett said, "In my opinion, teaching in a class with many students is difficult for me, especially when managing the 2nd graders who have the nature of not being able to keep quiet". One of the factors why large classes are a problem for the participants is because teaching English is quite challenging as they do not come from an English background. Therefore, Nova added, "It's already difficult for me to teach English, and it's even more difficult to teach big number of students who perhaps don't like and can't accept English easily".

Diverse Students Characteristics. It is inevitable that in one class there will be many students with various characters, abilities, and interests. In the same way as students' intelligence, students' habits and characters can also affect the teaching methods used by teachers. One participant, Luna stated "I have difficulty [in the class] because of the different characteristics of the students; some [students] are fast, and some others are slow, so I need to repeat the material many times". Nova added

> "Some students can receive lessons very quickly, and some others don't understand English at all. So, there must be some [students] who are left behind. If for example I have to follow the rhythm of the slow students, the fast students are already bored. And vice versa".

In another case, students' different habits can also affect teaching method that teacher use as Rain said,

> " …… it does affect my teaching method. I have a bit of difficulty, especially when teaching students who are not familiar with English words, students who often hear things related to English and children who rarely do. It's a different learning level".

Similar situation is experienced by Willow who added

> "Children have characters that are rather difficult to manage in class, such as being easily distracted, having a short focus time, and being very active, and having different interests which results in different abilities in learning English as well".

These excerpts show that different students characteristics are potential to cause problems to non-English major teachers. This can also be exacerbated by the inclusion policy in education in which schools have to admit all of students with all of condition. It means that it is necessary to find an effective solution on how to teach effectively without any students being left behind. The following findings explain the strategies used by non-English major teachers in teaching English.

2) English teaching strategies by non-English major teachers

Non-English major teachers have applied several strategies to teach English effectively despite all the limitations they had. There are six findings related to the strategies used by these participants consisting of 1) participating in teacher professional development program, 2) engaging in peer discussions, 3) carrying out independent learning, 4) utilizing learning applications, 5) using learning media, and 6) forming study groups. Each strategy is described in the following paragraphs. These variety of activities reflect Vygotsky's principle of learning through interaction with more knowledgeable others, facilitating development within the Zone of Proximal Development.

Participating in Teacher Professional Development (TPD) Programs. Three participants admitted that they participated in teacher professional development programs as an attempt to hone their skills in teaching English. Scarlett said, "I have attended English training and was taught the basics of English, but it was quite a long time ago". Willow added "I once attended an English seminar at the school where I taught before; the event was conducted by university students and there were also participants from overseas. Finally, Jasper who attended some seminars said, "I once attended a webinar about the basic principles of teaching English, and then there was training on how to make English teaching media".

Despite these three participants have attended teachers' professional development programs, they are not carried out regularly, and they have been done a long time ago. In these programs, the participants learned about the basics of English, principles of teaching English, and how to make English teaching media. This activity indeed brought benefits to them as non-English major teachers; however, not all participants got chances to participate in this TPD activity. Other participant, Willow stated, "The training was actually quite useful, especially for people like me who are not really proficient in English. The knowledge that I got at that time contribute to my skills when teaching English". Further interview with the participants revealed the cause of the participants' absence in attending TPD such as lack of school opportunity to have TPD events, especially those related to English teaching, and no special program for non-English major teachers TPD. Nova said, There has never been an English language training program from the school, but the school facilitates books, in the library there are dictionaries, some English teaching media. That's all".

Engaging in Peer Discussion. The result of the interviews revealed that peer consultation became an important strategy used by non-English major teachers to support their teaching English. These participants often sought guidance and support from peers, especially those with better English skills. Willow mentioned "[…] we have had discussions, especially with Mrs. Rain because her English skills are the best here". Having similar statement, Nova added, "[...] I have done that [peer discussion]. I often discuss with Mrs. Rain, the 6th grade teacher, because she is more expert in English than me" (Nova). Another participant, Jasper also said,

> "I often do peer consultation after receiving report cards, especially with the 4th grade homeroom teacher as a diagnostic assessment for students who will move up to 5th grade. This way, I will get useful input such as, if these children are taught this chapter in two semesters, they will have difficulty because they haven't even memorized the alphabet".

Jasper used peer discussion as a tool for diagnostic assessment and this is quite helpful as a preparation for learning English in his class. Interestingly, Rain who is regarded the best and always gives insights to her peers also stated,

> "I sometimes have discussions with other homeroom teachers, such as maybe there is material that is still similar, then I ask what kind of task book is used in grade 4, then I give examples to make it easier for the children to learn".

This excerpt indicates that the learning environment among teachers in the school is extraordinary in that not only teachers with low level of English learn from the more knowledgeable other, but also the teacher regarded having good English skill discuss with others too.

Carrying Out Independent Learning. Teachers should be creative in finding solutions to overcome the problems in teaching English; one of which is carrying out independent learning. Similarly, conducting independent learning was a common strategy applied by all participants in which they utilized various social media platforms, such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp, to access learning resources on English language teaching methods, classroom management techniques, and fun learning activities for children. One participant, Rain mentioned "I usually learn English from YouTube, TikTok, Instagram. Nowadays, there is a lot of content about learning English, such as learning grammar, how to condition the classroom, teaching tips and tricks, and so on". Nova added "I like to find out how to teach English to make it fun for children through video tutorials on YouTube, on social media like on Instagram, TikTok. There are a lot of learning media and others" . Similar opinion was mentioned by Scarlett "I like watching English teaching content on TikTok or YouTube; it is quite inspiring for me who does not come from an English background and does not really understand the principles of teaching English".

Utilizing Learning Application. Non-English major teachers effectively used technology in their teaching practices, especially learning applications. The most application used by participants is google translate. Nova stated "If I feel difficult, the first thing I will [do] definitely asking Google". Scarlett added "When I have difficulties in pronouncing a word, I search for it on Google Translate and then practice with my students on how to pronounce it". Having similar Experience with these two participants, Jasper stated "If there are some meanings of words or pronunciations that I don't know, I use Google Translate application and its speaker feature as a technology that can help me teach in class." (Jasper). In addition, the participants also used several other applications such as Duolingo, Quizziz, Pinterest, and ChatGPT, for both personal and professional development, as mentioned by Jasper,

> "I like to use Pinterest or ChatGPT app and save all kinds of things related to English. In addition, I use the latest application, namely Duolingo and games on the Word Wall. I have asked all my students to download and try Duolingo. My students are at what level. Duolingo is a very good application, in my opinion, because there are pictures, students can construct sentences, learn prepositions such as on in under by".

Rain, similarly, mentioned "I use applications such as Quizziz and Duolingo. For me, Duolingo is an application which can improve my personal English skills and can be apply to my class". Rain also used the same application as Jasper, Duolingo. But unlike Jasper, Rain uses the app not only for her students but to improve her own English skills.

Using Learning Media. The study found that the participants effectively used various learning media to enhance student engagement and support teaching English. Luna said, "I use YouTube to show videos like how to write numbers in English and I like to print pictures like colours and objects in the classroom". Just like Luna, Scarlett added, "I play a video to the students on how to pronounce the word correctly, and for interactive media, I usually use flashcards, print pictures, and use moving animations, as well as YouTube for videos". In contrast, Rani tends not to print pictures, but she uses Power Point media to show a picture. Rani said, "I mostly use videos or music on YouTube as teaching media. First, I download it, and second, I use PPT to show pictures, and share it with the students.". On the other hand, Jasper uses more varied interactive media, and he said,

> "Usually I use a computer in which I show a picture and put English captions below it. I also convert text into images using Canva, or I print it so that it is easier for me to deliver the material in class. I once also asked the students to bring small notebooks and asked them to have vocabulary competition to write as many English vocabulary as possible. Finally, I usually like to use commonly used instructions such as using *Indomie* [instant noodle] packaging for teaching.".

Forming Study Groups. One way to deal with problems related to big class size and diverse learning needs in the classroom is by grouping students. This strategy is stated by Jasper, "I have grouped students several times in teaching English and other subjects because it is quite a solution in a class with many students". In this case, student grouping can be done in a several ways. Scarlett said, ".......... I usually deal with it [problems in teaching English] by creating study groups, like peer tutors, where in one group there are those who stand out compared to their friends and help each other". Finally, Nova added "......... I made study groups where students were divided into groups. In

one group, there are very smart, average, and weak abilities. So, the weak ones can be taught by the smart ones.".

3.2. Discussion

The findings revealed six main challenges faced by non-English major teachers in teaching English to elementary school students: pronunciation difficulties, limited vocabulary, mother tongue interference, inadequate teaching skills, large class sizes, and diverse student characteristics. Across multiple cases, pronunciation emerged as the most pressing concern, echoing (Nagauleng et al., 2021), who noted that limited training and rare opportunities for practice contribute to teachers' lack of confidence in oral English. Similarly, most participants reported struggling with vocabulary, consistent with Millán Librado and Basurto Santos (2020) and Nafissi and Shafiee (2020), who highlighted teachers' difficulties in selecting appropriate words for young learners.

Mother tongue influence also appeared across cases, particularly in the form of interlingual transfer from Javanese or Indonesian to English vowel sounds (Febrianto, 2021). In terms of pedagogy, several teachers admitted relying heavily on textbooks due to inadequate training in lesson design, which often left them dissatisfied with their own teaching. This pattern suggests a reliance on informal learning as a substitute for institutional training, reinforcing the need for structured professional support systems. Large class sizes and the inclusion of students with varied abilities further complicated classroom management. These findings align with Cahyati et al. (2019) and (Sinaga & Oktaviani, 2020), who noted that without tailored strategies, teachers may struggle to engage all learners effectively.

To address these challenges, teachers adopted several strategies, including participation in professional development, peer discussions, independent learning, the use of digital applications, and the formation of study groups. Most participants emphasized peer collaboration as a valuable resource, as it allowed them to share knowledge, exchange classroom strategies, and boost confidence. At the same time, digital tools such as Duolingo, Quizziz, and ChatGPT were widely adopted as cultural resources for vocabulary building, pronunciation practice, and lesson preparation. Together, these strategies reflect an adaptive and resourceful approach, though one that remains heavily dependent on individual initiative rather than systemic support.

Interpretation through Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory provides a useful lens for interpreting these findings. First, the emphasis on peer discussions and study groups illustrates the role of social interaction in teacher development. Across cases, teachers benefited from colleagues' guidance, an example of scaffolding that enabled them to operate within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). For instance, Rain's consultations with colleagues helped her gradually improve classroom practice, showing how temporary support can lead to independent competence. This finding is consistent with Uthaikun (2021), who demonstrated the value of mentoring in building teacher confidence.

Second, the integration of learning applications and media highlights the role of cultural tools in mediated learning. Teachers' use of apps like Duolingo and interactive platforms aligns with Namaziandost and Nasri (2019), who emphasized the transformative potential of digital resources in language education. These tools functioned as mediators that supported teachers' professional growth despite their lack of formal training.

Third, participation in professional development programs represents another form of scaffolding, where structured lesson plans and continuous feedback allowed teachers to function within their ZPD until they developed greater independence. As teachers became more confident, the external support was gradually reduced, illustrating Vygotsky's principle of fading assistance.

Finally, the practice of grouping students according to ability demonstrates how teachers addressed learner diversity by creating opportunities for peer learning. This reflects Marzulina (2022) observation that collaborative approaches can balance social interaction with effective learning among students of varying abilities.

Overall, the findings underscore that non-English major teachers rely heavily on social interaction, cultural tools, and scaffolding mechanisms to overcome their challenges. While these strategies demonstrate resilience, they also reveal systemic gaps that leave teachers dependent on informal networks and self-initiated efforts. By applying Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, this study

highlights the crucial role of collaborative learning and digital mediation in compensating for the absence of formal training. These insights not only confirm existing research but also extend it by showing how peer modelling and technology adoption shape teacher development in the Indonesian elementary school context.

4. Conclusion

This qualitative study investigated the challenges and strategies employed by non-English major teachers in teaching English to elementary school students in Indonesia. The findings revealed six key challenges: pronunciation difficulties, limited vocabulary, mother tongue interference, limited teaching skills, large class sizes, and diverse student characteristics. To address these challenges, teachers employed various strategies, including participating in professional development programs, conducting peer consultations, pursuing independent learning, utilizing learning technology and interactive media, and forming study groups. The analysis using Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory highlighted the importance of social interactions, cultural tools, and scaffolding in overcoming these challenges. Teachers can strengthen their instructional effectiveness in pronunciation, vocabulary usage, and learner engagement through scaffolded support and targeted technological tools. The study underscores the critical need for ongoing professional development and support for non-English major teachers to improve their teaching practices and student learning outcomes. This study contributes to the under-researched area of non-English major teachers in Indonesian public elementary schools, providing empirical insights that can inform both policy and teacher training models rooted in sociocultural learning principles. Given the limited participant pool and regional focus, future studies should explore larger, more diverse populations across Indonesia. Quantitative studies on student learning outcomes could further validate the strategies identified here.

Declarations

Author contribution	:	The research was collaboratively undertaken by both authors, encompassing topic selection, proposal development, methodological application, data analysis, and the preparation of the discussion section. Author 1 assumed primary responsibility for managing the publication process, while both authors jointly contributed to covering the publication fee.
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Ethics Declaration	:	As the authors, we confirm that this work has been written based on ethical research principles in compliance with our university's regulations and that the necessary permission was obtained from the relevant institution during data collection. We fully support ELTEJ's commitment to upholding high standards of professional conduct and practicing honesty in all academic and professional activities.
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