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## Beyond specialist preparation: Non-english-specialist teachers' self-supported pedagogy for young learners in Indonesian primary schools

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**Abstract.** *This study explores Indonesian primary school non-English-specialist teachers' self-supported teaching. The study found that classroom teachers teach English for Young Learners without English Education, which raises questions about students' elementary preparedness and how curriculum direction, institutional support, and classroom teachers' knowledge vary across schools. This research investigates how primary English teachers teaching non-English-specialism through learning resources and classroom challenges. Based on semi-structured interviews and observations, it discovered that self-study, internet, translated textbooks, bilingual explanation, song, game, visuals (pictures or videos), and co-working with peers are the teaching strategies teachers used to cope. Limited vocabulary, maladaptive phonetic systems, low confidence, limited preschool exposure to English and the mismatch between a language of higher preferential textual exposure compared to their first language were among the challenges. To make English useable, they had to use YouTube videos or other online materials, draw on their English learning experiences, provide some local language exposure, and experiment. However, a lack of teacher training in English teaching (teacher aid), poor material and curricular direction, expensive administrative costs, challenging time allocations for instruction, and confusing English instruction models hampered the effort. The results show that English non-specialists had pedagogical agency internally but needed professional instruction in pedagogy and classroom scaffolding.*

**Keywords:** Non-English-specialist teachers; English for Young Learners; self-supported pedagogy; primary English education; teacher agency.

### INTRODUCTION

English language learning at the primary school level has become an increasingly important issue in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, including Indonesia. Early English exposure is often linked to children's future academic mobility, access to global knowledge, and intercultural communication. But English for young learners is not simply about introducing English as a subject earlier. Teaching young learners requires specific pedagogical knowledge related to developmentally appropriate activities, meaningful interaction, repetition, classroom routines, multimodal input and affective support. Thus, the quality of basic English instruction is determined not only by the curriculum policy but also by teachers' language competency, pedagogical competence, classroom management skills and the ability to adjust instruction to children's cognitive, social and emotional qualities. Previous study has indicated that teachers of young learners commonly experience difficulties with speaking activities, learner motivation, classroom discipline, differentiation, grammar and writing teaching and limited resources (Copland et al., 2014). These issues are further compounded in Indonesia by changing policy positions and inconsistent implementation of primary English among schools. Provision is determined by interpretation of curriculum, institutional preparation, local government priorities, teacher availability and family expectations. The current curriculum modifications have revived

attention on English in primary education. But some schools are served by teachers with English education backgrounds, while others are served by classroom instructors or teachers from non-English academic specialisations.

In this article, non-English-specialist teachers are teachers who teach English to primary school learners without formal academic specialisation or professional preparation in English language education. These include general classroom teachers, teachers of other subjects or primary school teachers assigned to English due to institutional needs. By young learners we mean primary school-aged children whose language acquisition is best served by age-sensitive, activity-based and emotionally supportive teaching. Meanwhile, the self-supported pedagogy is teacher-initiated pedagogical techniques that are formed via personal effort, available resources, peer aid, digital materials, past teaching experience and contextual adaptability, not formal specialist training. This does not mean that instructors may be left to their own devices without institutional assistance, rather that they devise practical ways of teaching as they go, without formal preparation, systematic mentoring or specialist resources. Research on primary English education in Indonesia reveals that English for young learners is influenced by policy uncertainty, teacher preparedness, school-level decision making, and local educational context (Hawanti, 2014; Sulistiyo et al., 2020; Zein, 2017). The studies also show that the teachers who are not English majors or specialists may have some problems in pronunciation, usage of vocabulary, classroom English, lesson design, evaluation, and confidence to handle English contact with the learner (Romadhon et al., 2024; Widagsa et al., 2025). Such restrictions may result in an increased dependence on translation, memorisation, textbook procedures or structurally controlled activities. Although such practices may serve to sustain classroom discipline, they may not always offer enough possibilities for meaningful language usage.

However, it is important to note that teachers who are not English specialists should not be seen only as lacking, since they have been shown to develop adaptive strategies that make English learnable and engaging for children, such as songs, games, pictures, gestures, classroom routines, bilingual explanation, digital media, peer consultation and culturally familiar examples. Such actions suggest that non-English-specialist teachers are pedagogical actors who read institutional expectations, respond to learners' needs and negotiate the limitations of their professional background. This article is conceptually situated in Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) and grounded in teacher agency and context-responsive pedagogy. Teacher agency is defined as teachers' ability to make pedagogical decisions, adapt available resources and respond meaningfully to contextual constraints. Context-responsive pedagogy is defined as teaching practices adjusted to learners' needs, school conditions, cultural expectations and available instructional resources. While primary English has received ever-growing attention in Indonesia, less emphasis has been paid to the self-supported pedagogical methods by which non-English expert teachers compensate for the paucity of specialised training. This article fills this gap by examining non-English-specialist teachers' perceptions of their role as English teachers, the strategies they use to support children's English learning, the challenges that influence their instructional decisions, and how they make up for limited formal preparation. This article foregrounds self-supported pedagogy and argues that improving primary English instruction requires not only expanding English as a subject, but also understanding teachers' pedagogical agency, working constraints, and the institutional support needed to transform self-supported practice into more sustainable and professionally guided English teaching, contributing to discussions on TEYL, primary English policy, and teacher professional development in Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

The stated experience and actual instructional techniques of teachers were investigated through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Interviews looked examined teachers' backgrounds, preparedness, techniques, obstacles, utilisation of resources, professional support, and approaches to compensate for insufficient English-specialist preparation. Three teaching sessions were observed per participant, resulting in a total of 21 observed lessons. Field notes documented language use, instructional strategies, classroom interaction, learning media, learner engagement, classroom management, feedback, activity adaptation, and multilingual or multimodal teaching practices. The data were grouped by participant codes and evaluated thematically using repeated reading, coding, categorisation and theme development. Interview and observation data were merged to enhance the credibility of

the findings.

Data were acquired through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to capture the teachers' stated experiences and observable instructional techniques. The interviews investigated teachers' origins, their teaching experiences, their preparedness, the tactics they apply, the obstacles they face, the utilisation of resources, the professional support they receive, and the ways in which they compensate for their inadequate training as English specialists. Classroom observations took place in three sessions for each participant, resulting in 21 observed lessons, in which field notes recorded language use, instructional strategies, classroom interaction, learning media, learner engagement, classroom management, feedback, activity adaptation, and the use of English, Indonesian, local languages, songs, games, gestures, drawings, and digital resources. Data were organised by participant codes and analysed thematically by repeated reading, coding, categorisation and topic development. Data from both interviews and observations were triangulated to discover consistencies and discrepancies between teachers' pedagogical explanations and classroom practices, so increasing the trustworthiness of the findings.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis of interview and classroom observation data revealed that non-English-specialist teachers developed their English teaching practices through a form of self-supported pedagogy. This pedagogy was not built primarily from formal English-specialist preparation, but from teachers' general pedagogical experience as primary school teachers, their personal learning efforts, available digital resources, school-level expectations, and their direct understanding of young learners' classroom behaviour. Five major themes emerged from the data: (1) teachers' contextual reading of young learners, (2) adaptive planning under limited specialist preparation, (3) interactive and multimodal teaching practices, (4) pragmatic assessment and feedback, and (5) challenges and self-support strategies.

**Table 1.** Thematic Map of the Findings

Main Theme	Key Finding	Representative Evidence from the Data	Interpretive Meaning
Understanding young learners contextually	Teachers identified learners' needs through initial questioning, diagnostic activities, classroom behaviour, written tasks, confidence, and family background.	Teachers reported using initial questions, diagnostic assessment, learner observation, and individual approaches to identify students' readiness, confidence, and learning difficulties.	Non-English-specialist teachers relied strongly on their knowledge as classroom teachers to understand learners before designing English instruction.
Adaptive planning	Lesson planning was flexible and often adjusted to learners' actual readiness rather than strictly following textbooks or curriculum materials.	Teachers modified objectives, simplified textbook materials, searched for materials online, and selected vocabulary related to students' everyday lives.	Planning was context-responsive but uneven; it depended heavily on teacher initiative and available resources.
Multimodal and interactive pedagogy	Teachers used songs, games, pictures, gestures, smartboard/video, group work, role-play, and outdoor activities to sustain young learners' engagement.	Observations showed the use of PowerPoint, smartboard, pictures, worksheets, group discussion, school tour activities, songs, and student presentations.	Although teachers were not English specialists, they used age-appropriate TEYL strategies to make English more concrete, enjoyable, and understandable.
Assessment and feedback	Assessment was mostly practical, formative, and task-based, but written	Teachers used worksheets, written exercises, oral questions, pronunciation practice, group presentation, stars, verbal	Assessment helped teachers monitor learning, but systematic recording of individual

Main Theme	Key Finding	Representative Evidence from the Data	Interpretive Meaning
Challenges and self-support	assessment remained dominant.	praise, remedial support, and enrichment.	language development was still limited.
	Major challenges included limited English preparation, lack of training, limited or unsuitable materials, class size, learner diversity, local language influence, curriculum demands, and administrative workload.	Teachers compensated through self-study, YouTube, TikTok, PMM, internet materials, AI, peer consultation, parent communication, bilingual explanation, classroom routines, and reward systems.	Self-supported pedagogy shows teacher agency, but it remains fragile without sustained professional development and institutional support.

### Teachers' Contextual Reading of Young Learners

The first study shows that teachers' self-supported pedagogy began with recognising young learners' English readiness. Although not English specialists, participants used their primary school teaching experience to interpret children's behaviour, motivation, pace of learning, classroom responses, confidence, emotional state, family support, use of local language, and learning preferences. Casual questioning, diagnostic exercises, written assignments, oral responses, classroom involvement, and observation of struggling students measured learners' readiness. This study counters the idea that non-English-specialist instructors were incompetent teachers by showing that they were contextually aware of children as learners. Even though teachers could identify students' needs, they sometimes lacked the expertise to plan sustained progression in pronunciation, vocabulary, speaking practice, and assessment.

### Adaptive Planning under Limited Specialist Preparation

The second finding indicated that teachers flexibly prepared English activities, employing textbooks, worksheets, government materials, online sources, and self-made resources; nonetheless, they typically simplified content according to students' poor English readiness. They concentrated on fundamental vocabulary, familiar topics, simple expressions and in some cases local tourism or culture. But planning was variable, demonstrating that self-supported pedagogy contributed to sustaining English teaching but did not always guarantee a coherent alignment of curriculum.

### Interactive and Multimodal Teaching Practices

The third finding reveals that the teachers employed multimodal and interactive activities to engage the students in learning English. Interviews and observation showed use of music, games, images, movies, smartboards, drawings, gestures, repetition, group work, role-play, worksheets and guided questioning. These approaches helped to make English more tangible, fun and accessible for young learners through visual, aural, social and activity oriented learning.

**Table 2.** Representative Classroom Observation Patterns

Observed Topic	Main Media/Resources	Main Classroom Activities	Pedagogical Pattern
My school	PowerPoint, worksheet, school environment	Vocabulary repetition, preposition practice, group work, outdoor school tour	Concrete contextual learning through school-based exploration
Food and drink	Pictures, worksheet, smartboard,	Vocabulary translation, repetition, sentence making, individual task, feedback, star reward	Visual-supported vocabulary learning with formative feedback

Observed Topic	Main Media/Resources	Main Classroom Activities	Pedagogical Pattern
Parts of body and function	Smartboard, video, worksheet, song	Body-part identification, video-based listening, questioning, group task, singing	Multimodal input combining visual, auditory, and kinesthetic support
Daily activities	Pictures, audiovisual media, worksheet	Ice breaking, questioning, group discussion, presentation, reflection	Topic-based learning connected to students' daily routines
Family	Family structure picture, worksheet, group activity	Topic explanation, group formation, worksheet presentation, homework	Familiar-topic learning through collaboration and presentation

### Pragmatic Assessment and Feedback

The fourth conclusion indicates that educators employed practical assessment techniques, such as worksheets, written examinations, oral enquiries, pronunciation exercises, group assignments, presentations, observational involvement, and informal feedback, with written assessments prevailing as the primary way. The oral evaluation mostly focused on pronunciation, basic enquiries, or reading aloud, while incentives and commendations were employed to inspire students and regulate behaviour. While these techniques facilitated the identification of pupils requiring assistance, systematic documentation of pronunciation, vocabulary development, oral engagement, confidence, and communicative proficiency was insufficient, highlighting the necessity for more age-appropriate formative assessment instruments.

### Challenges in Teaching English without Specialist Preparation

The fifth finding shows that non-English-specialist teachers faced challenges related to limited specialist preparation, resource suitability, learner diversity, local language use, large classes, limited time, and administrative demands. Although some had basic English exposure through schooling, pesantren, tourism work, or self-learning, they lacked formal training in TEYL and struggled with pronunciation, vocabulary, material selection, classroom English, assessment, and curriculum alignment. Teachers often used online resources such as YouTube, TikTok, Google, and PMM, but concerns remained about quality, sequencing, accuracy, and relevance. These challenges were intensified by varied student readiness, limited lesson time, large class sizes, and Merdeka Curriculum administration, especially for teachers who also served as general classroom teachers.

### Self-Support Strategies: How Teachers Sustained Their Pedagogy

Teachers maintained English instruction through self-learning, material modification, multilingual support, classroom procedures and collaborative learning. They used books, YouTube, internet resources, TikTok, PMM, AI at times, simplified textbook chores, used topics that students were familiar with, added pictures, created worksheets, and related lessons to students' daily lives. Indonesian and local languages aided with understanding and eased anxiety, but too much translation could limit exposure to English. Classroom routines, prizes, music, mixed-ability teamwork, group seating and parent communication fostered engagement and participation. These tactics demonstrate that teachers without English-specialization have built up independent and flexible, context-dependent pedagogy based on their practical knowledge, classroom experience, accessible resources and the requirements of students.

The data reveal the difficult situation of the non-English-specialist instructors in Indonesian basic English instruction. They are not proficient in English, TEYL methodology, assessment literacy and curricular interpretation which may impair pronunciation modelling, exposure to English in the classroom, communicative practice and assessment validity (Romadhon et al., 2024; Widagsa et al., 2025). But they also show considerable pedagogical agency in searching for materials, adjusting tasks, employing digital media, setting up classroom routines, offering individual support and planning stimulating activities for young children. This demonstrates how professional competence can be developed through situational practice, reflection, adaptability

and responsiveness to learners. However, self-supported education should not be romanticised as reliance on human effort, online platforms and trial-and-error procedures may result in inconsistent material quality, insufficient task sequencing, limited communicative value and incomplete assessment of oral growth. Therefore, the question is not whether non-English-specialist teachers should teach English, since many already do so as a result of teacher shortages, school policy or curriculum demands, but how their agency can be supported and professionalised through targeted training, curated resources, mentoring, collaborative teacher groups and practical assessment tools.

## CONCLUSION

The study explored the use of self-supported pedagogy for teaching English to young learners by primary school instructors who were not English specialists. These findings suggest that teachers created practical techniques to identify learner's preparedness, adjust materials and use music, games, visuals, digital media, group work, bilingual explanation and classroom routines. These activities were indicative of teacher agency and response to context, but limits remained in English proficiency, pronunciation modelling, communicative contact, course progression and formative evaluation. Self-supported pedagogy should therefore be supported by targeted training, appropriate resources, mentoring, collaborative forums and practical evaluation tools. The study was limited to seven teachers in West Nusa Tenggara; therefore, the findings are context-specific. Further research can investigate specialist versus non-specialist comparisons and student outcomes or the effects of professional development.

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