

Best Practices in Teaching Approaches for Teaching English at Elementary Schools: The Experiences of Former Students of PPG Prajabatan

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates best practices in teaching English at elementary schools as implemented by alumni of the PPG Prajabatan Program from Sriwijaya University who currently teach in Palembang. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through semi-structured written interviews with three PPG Prajabatan 2022 alumni who have one to three years of teaching experience at the elementary level. The study focused on identifying concrete teaching practices that support student engagement and language development in early EFL classrooms. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's procedures, including familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, and interpretation. The findings revealed three major best practices: differentiated instruction tailored to students' readiness and learning styles, communicative and game-based learning to promote active language use, and flexible integration of multiple teaching approaches adjusted to classroom needs and lesson objectives. Rather than applying a single method, participants combined various strategies to create meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how professionally trained teachers translate pedagogical knowledge into classroom practice. Practically, the study offers insights for teacher education programs, particularly PPG Prajabatan, to strengthen reflective practice, instructional flexibility, and creativity in preparing future English teachers for elementary school contexts.

Keywords: *Best Practices, Teaching Approaches, Elementary School, PPG Prajabatan, EFL*

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INTRODUCTION

In education, the term "best practices" is often used to describe teaching strategies or approaches proven effective in improving student learning outcomes. This approach focuses not only on delivering material but also on reflection, creativity, and the teacher's ability to adapt learning to the diverse needs of students. Joyce and Showers (2002) define best practices as evidence-based approaches born from real-life classroom experiences, while Sofanudin and Atmanto (2014) emphasize that best practices are always contextual and can serve as inspiration for other teachers to achieve optimal results.

In the context of English language learning in elementary schools in Indonesia, the application of best practices is very important because it is directly related to the success of students in understanding the language from an early age. Children at this level have unique characteristics, they tend to learn better through fun, interactive, and contextual activities. A number of previous studies have shown that methods such as songs, games, and story-based learning can increase children's motivation and language skills (Afriyuninda & Oktaviani, 2021); Khair et al., 2022; Ratri et al., 2024). In addition, approaches that integrate local cultural elements and technology have also been proven to create learning that is more relevant to students' lives (Rofi'i et al., 2023). However, most of these studies still focus on the application of strategies by teachers in general, without looking at how professional backgrounds or special training can affect the effectiveness of these strategies in the classroom.

Although previous studies have identified various best practices in teaching English at the elementary school level in Indonesia, they mostly focus on teaching strategies in general and pay little attention to the role of teachers' professional training. In particular, there is limited research examining how alumni of the PPG Prajabatan program implement their pedagogical knowledge in real classroom contexts. By focusing on teachers' lived experiences and reflective practices, this study seeks to contribute to the existing literature on English pedagogy for young learners and provide practical insights for teacher education programs in preparing future elementary school English teachers.

Pre-Service Teacher Profession Education Program or Pendidikan Profesi Guru (PPG) Prajabatan Program is a professional education program designed by the Indonesian government to prepare *Generasi Baru Guru Indonesia* or a new generation of Indonesian teachers who are passionate about teaching, demonstrate professionalism, are committed to being role models, love the teaching profession, and embrace lifelong learning (Education Directorate of Teacher Profession, 2024). This program is designed to equip prospective teachers, both from educational and non-educational backgrounds, with pedagogical competencies and teaching skills. PPG Prajabatan graduates are expected to not only understand learning theory but also be able to apply it in real situations with a reflective and innovative approach (Alifia et al., 2022). Specifically at Sriwijaya University, this program has produced a number of English teachers who now teach at elementary schools in the city of Palembang. They bring new experiences from professional training that is oriented towards direct practice and self-development as reflective teachers.

Through this study, the author seeks to know the best practices in teaching approaches for teaching English at the primary school level as implemented by the alumni of PPG Prajabatan program of FKIP Unsri who are employed as primary school teachers in Palembang. This study is expected to provide a realistic picture of how the professional training they underwent influences the teaching strategies they use, as well as how these practices help create a fun, communicative, and meaningful learning atmosphere for early childhood students.

Research question

Based on this background, the main question to be answered in this study is: What are the best practices in English teaching approaches in elementary schools implemented by alumni of the PPG Prajabatan Program from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University, who currently work as English teachers in Palembang?

Significance of the Study

This study has significant value both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the results of this study enrich the understanding of effective English teaching practices at the elementary school level, especially from the perspective of teachers who have undergone professional training. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for teachers, prospective teachers, and educational institutions in developing more innovative, adaptive, and enjoyable learning strategies for children. Furthermore, the documentation of best practices implemented by alumni of the PPG Prajabatan Program can also serve as evaluation material for program organizers to continuously improve the quality of teacher training in the future.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach because its primary focus is understanding teachers' real-life experiences in implementing the best approaches to teaching English in elementary schools. As explained by Creswell (2009), qualitative research aims to explore the meanings that emerge from social events or human experiences through the perspectives of participants. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand teachers' teaching practices more deeply, not only in terms of classroom actions, but also in how they reflect on their experiences and the pedagogical decisions they make.

Research Participants



The participants in this study were three alumni of the 2022 Pendidikan Profesi Guru (PPG) program from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University, who currently teach English at several elementary schools in Palembang City. Of the 38 alumni, three were purposively selected based on the criterion that they were English subject teachers (not classroom teachers). This criterion is important because subject teachers have special responsibilities in designing, implementing, and evaluating the learning process within their field of expertise.

Participants were selected based on their direct experience implementing the PPG training outcomes in diverse elementary school settings. Through their experiences, researchers were able to observe the variety of strategies and approaches used, while also understanding how professional training impacts daily teaching practice.

Although the number of participants was limited, the selection was aligned with the qualitative nature of the study, which prioritizes depth of data rather than generalizability. The small sample allowed for a more detailed exploration of each participant's teaching experiences and pedagogical reasoning, which was sufficient to address the research aim of identifying best practices in elementary English teaching.

Research Instruments

To collect data, this study used semi-structured written interviews. According to Adams (2015), semi-structured interviews provide a balance between directed questions and the freedom for participants to explain their experiences in greater depth. In this study, interviews were conducted in writing using a Google Form, containing a number of open-ended questions related to teaching approaches, classroom reflections, and the challenges and innovations they encountered.

The written format was chosen because the participants were busy as active teachers, allowing them sufficient time to reflect and write down their answers reflectively. Furthermore, written interview results facilitated documentation and analysis, as all data was immediately stored digitally.

To enhance data credibility, participants were given the opportunity to review their responses after submission to ensure accuracy and clarity of meaning. This process functioned as a form of member checking, helping to reduce potential misinterpretation of participants' intended meanings.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process began with repeated reading of all data to understand the context, then coding key sections related to the research focus. The researchers then grouped these codes into key themes that reflected best practices in English language teaching approaches. This analytical approach helped researchers discover patterns and meanings emerging from teachers' experiences, rather than simply grouping responses based on frequency. The results of this process yielded 3 main themes that reflect best practices implemented by participants: differentiated instruction, game-based communicative learning, and pedagogical flexibility through an eclectic approach.

Through this process, three main themes were identified as representations of best practices in teaching English at the elementary school level: differentiated instruction, communicative and game-based learning, and flexible integration of multiple teaching approaches. This systematic analytical procedure was intended to enhance transparency and ensure that the findings were firmly grounded in the participants' responses.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

This study aims to identify best practices implemented by alumni of the Pre-Service English Program (PPG) from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP) at Sriwijaya University in teaching English in elementary schools. Based on data analysis from three participants, four main themes were identified that describe their teaching practices:

the application of differentiated instruction,

Differentiated Instruction

First, the results of the data analysis show that all participants applied a teaching approach tailored to the students' skill levels, backgrounds, and motivation.

"Saya mulai dari mengevaluasi tingkat kemahiran... gunakan metode pengajaran multisensori...." (Participant B)

"Siswa yang lebih paham... menjadi tutor teman sebaya..." (Participant U)

"Saya tempatkan siswa pemalu di akhir untuk dibimbing oleh teman..." (Participant N)

Participant B explained that she always began the learning process by first assessing the students' level of understanding, then selecting the appropriate teaching method. She often used pictures, sounds, movements, and even real objects to help students understand the material from various perspectives, so that students with different learning styles could still follow along.

Participant U had another strategy. She involved students who already understood the material to help students who were having difficulty. This method created a more intimate classroom atmosphere because students helped each other, and for students who acted as tutors, it also provided an opportunity to practice their ability to explain things in their own words.

Participant N added that she pays special attention to shy students. This way, students can see examples from their peers first and be more prepared when their turn comes. Support from classmates or groups also gives them greater confidence to excel.

Communicative Approach and Game-Based Learning

The results of the study show that all three participants consistently used a communicative approach combined with games as their main teaching strategy. The aim was to encourage students to actively interact in English while making the learning process enjoyable.

"Game-based learning membuat anak menjadi lebih semangat dan antusias." (Participant B)

"Pendekatan komunikatif... saya bangun bonding dan cerita personal dengan siswa." (Participant N)

"Melatih kepercayaan diri siswa/i... pendekatan komunikatif dan lagu dalam materi parts of body." (Participant U)

Participant B shared that she often used games in class to maintain student enthusiasm. She noted that when children played while learning, they appeared to be much more enthusiastic and engaged. She usually chose games that were directly related to the material, so that in addition to being fun, students could also absorb the learning effectively.

Participant N preferred a communicative approach. She believed that language learning was more effective when students felt comfortable speaking and were emotionally connected to their teacher. She often start lessons with casual conversations or sharing relevant stories to encourage students to share their stories in English without feeling awkward.

Participant U combines a communicative approach with musical elements, especially for certain topics such as body parts. She believe that simple songs accompanied by movements help students memorize vocabulary more quickly and become more confident speaking in front of their friends.

Pedagogical Flexibility through Eclectic Integration

The results of the study show that participants did not rely on just one method, but combined various approaches according to their learning needs. They used these strategies to optimize learning outcomes, adapt to the material, student characteristics, and classroom situations.

"Kombinasi dari semua pendekatan... tergantung materi dan karakter siswa." (Participant U)

"Saya menggunakan Think-Pair-Share, Jamboard, pembelajaran kolaboratif..." (Participant B)

"Saya juga menggunakan Grammar-Translation jika ingin memperkuat struktur kalimat." (Participant N)

Participant U revealed that she often combined various approaches and teaching techniques. For example, for material that required speaking skills, she preferred communicative methods and interactive games. However, for material that requires conceptual understanding, they tend to use more structured and visual explanations.

Participant B explained that she often use the Think-Pair-Share strategy, the Jamboard application, and collaborative learning. She believe that Think-Pair-Share helps students think independently first, then discuss with their peers, before presenting their findings to the class. The use of Jamboard gives him space to display students' ideas visually, while collaborative learning creates a collaborative atmosphere that encourages the participation of all students.

Participant N added that she also occasionally uses the Grammar-Translation method, especially when she wants to reinforce students' understanding of sentence structure. She believed that while this method may seem traditional, it's still effective when used at the right time, especially when students need to connect language forms with clearer meanings.

Discussion

First of all, the finding indicate that all three participants implemented learning differentiation according to student readiness, motivation, and character, in line with Tomlinson's (2005) notion of content, process, and product differentiation, as well as Vygotsky (1978) theory of the ZPD. Participant B emphasized multisensory strategies as a form of process differentiation, Participant U utilized peer tutoring that reflected the support of a "more knowledgeable other" within the ZPD, while Participant N gave shy students last turns as affective scaffolding to increase their confidence. These practices not only demonstrate teacher flexibility but also confirm Chodhori and Diastama (2024) findings that contextual, collaborative, and peer-support-based learning are effective in increasing student participation in elementary classroom.

Next, the findings confirmed that the communicative approach (CLT) and game-based learning (GBL) were the most preferred strategies by participants because they created an active, enjoyable learning environment while simultaneously building emotional connections with students. This aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input, and Long's Interaction Hypothesis, which highlights the role of interaction in language acquisition. Participant B relied on games to stimulate motivation and engagement, Participant N emphasized close, personal communication to foster student confidence, while Participant U combined songs with communicative activities to strengthen vocabulary. These practices align with Gee's (2003) idea that games can stimulate intrinsic motivation and and active engagement in learning. Similarly, research by Syatriana and Erwin (2021) found that a communicative interaction-based teaching model can improve the learning outcomes of elementary school students in Indonesia, and Damrah et al. (2024) confirmed that game-based strategies are effective in vocabulary development.

Finally, the last findings indicate that participants were not fixated on a single method, but rather flexibly combined various approaches according to the material and student characteristics. This strategy aligns with Larsen-Freeman (2000) view of eclecticism in language teaching, where teachers are free to choose and mix methods to optimize learning outcomes. Participant U mentioned that she adjusted her approach depending on class needs, Participant B used variations such as Think-Pair-Share, Jamboard, and collaborative learning, while Participant N even continued to utilize Grammar-Translation to strengthen sentence structure when needed. This practice also aligns with the Integrated Language Skill Approach model described by Usman and Anwar (2021), where language learning is integrated to make it more relevant and effective, particularly in elementary school teacher education programs.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that best practices in teaching English at the elementary school level by FKIP Unsri PPG Prajabatan alumni are strongly influenced by teachers' ability to flexibly adapt instructional strategies to real classroom conditions by combining various approaches—such as differentiated instruction, communicative methods enriched with games, and relevant traditional techniques—according to students' characteristics and learning needs, which enables the creation of fun, interactive, and effective learning environments that enhance student motivation and learning outcomes. These findings imply that teacher education programs, particularly the PPG Prajabatan Program, should continue to emphasize instructional flexibility, reflective practice, creativity, and the practical application of differentiated instruction, while also strengthening teachers' skills in managing communicative and game-based activities and making context-based pedagogical decisions. However, the study is limited by the small number of participants and its reliance on self-reported written interviews, which may not fully represent actual classroom practices. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to continuously innovate in their teaching, schools should provide ongoing training and opportunities for professional sharing, PPG Prajabatan organizers should reinforce reflection and creativity in training, and future research should involve more participants and diverse school contexts to obtain a broader and more comprehensive understanding of best practices in elementary English teaching.

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