

Teachers' Strategies and Obstacles in Developing English Language Skills in the Foreign Language Special Program at Muhammadiyah 1 High School in Surakarta

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Abstract

This study explores the strategies used by teachers and the obstacles they face in developing students' English language skills in the Special Foreign Language Program at Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta High School. English is taught as a foreign language in Indonesia, so its use outside the classroom is limited, creating challenges for students in mastering the four skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The special foreign language program is designed to provide more intensive English language instruction, but its implementation still presents various difficulties for teachers, including differences in student motivation, limited learning resources, and classroom management issues. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research collected descriptive data through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings identify commonly applied strategies such as task-based learning, cooperative learning, and project-based activities and reveal several obstacles, including differences in student motivation and ability, limited learning resources, and curriculum demands. These findings provide important insights for improving English language learning practices and strengthening the implementation of specialized language programs in secondary education.

Keywords: teacher strategies; teaching obstacles; English language skills; Foreign Language Special Program; qualitative case study; EFL learning; Muhammadiyah 1 High School Surakarta.

Introduction

English has become one of the most important global languages, especially in the field of education. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), meaning that students rarely use it outside of class. This situation often makes it difficult for students to develop their English skills, such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing effectively. Therefore, teachers play a crucial role in designing the right strategies to make the learning process more interesting, meaningful, and effective.

At Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta High School, there is a Special Foreign Language Program, which aims to provide more intensive English language learning than the regular program. In this program, English is given more attention in terms of learning time and teaching methods, so that students are expected to become more confident and skilled in using English in real communication.

However in reality teacher often face various **obstacles** in implementing effective strategies. Some students still find english difficult to learn, especially when it comes to speaking fluently or understanding complex text. Limited exposure to english outside the classroom, differences in student motivation and background knowledge, and curriculum demands are among the main challenges faced by teacher. On the other hand, teacher must continuously adapt their strategies to student needs class condition and available school facilities.

This study is important because it seeks to identify the strategies used by teacher and the obstacles they encounter in developing student English language skiils within the Foreign Language Special Proram. By understanding these factors, the research can provide valuable insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and school to improve the quality of English learning. It can also serve as a reference for other school that want to implement similar program more effectively.

Difference between the Foreign Language Special Program and the Regular Program, In simple terms, the Foreign Language Special Program (FLSP) is designed for student who want to focus more on developing their english abilities. The program usually provides: More intensive learning hours for English compared to the regular class, smaller class size to allow more interaction between teacher and student, innovative learning methods such as english club, speaking, project, debates, or immersive learning activitie, english as a medium of instruction in some subject or activities. The Regular Program follow the national curriculum without additional hours of focus on foreign language. English is taught only as one of the school subject usually for 2-3 hours per week, and learning tends to be more textbook-oriented and exam focused.

Theoretical Review

According to Richards & Rodgers (2001), language teaching strategies include the approaches, methods, and techniques that teachers choose to help students achieve English language proficiency. In the context of FLSP, strategies must be tailored to the program's objectives: more learning hours, a focus on communication, and immersion activities. These strategies range from direct strategies (pronunciation exercises, drills) to indirect strategies (motivating students, classroom management). Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010) is the integration of academic content and language; it is suitable for use when FLSP uses English as the medium of instruction for several subjects or activities. Its effectiveness depends on implementation, teacher competence, and school support.

Essentially, teaching strategies are methods or approaches used by teachers to help students achieve English proficiency more effectively. Richards & Rodgers (2001) state that teaching strategies include approaches, methods, and techniques that support the mastery of four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In practice, teachers choose specific strategies to make the learning process more meaningful and focused, tailored to the needs of students, and aligned with the learning objectives to be achieved. These strategies are not singular or fixed, but can be combined according to the classroom situation. Teachers can use direct strategies such as vocabulary exercises, repetition exercises, or pronunciation exercises, as well as indirect strategies such as building motivation, managing the classroom, and creating a supportive learning environment. The choice of strategy will ultimately influence the development of students' English language skills.

Method

This study involved three English teachers teaching in the Foreign Language Program using a qualitative research approach because its main objective was to gain an in-depth understanding of how teachers apply appropriate strategies and what obstacles they face when developing students' English skills in the Special Foreign Language Program at Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta High School. As explained by Creswell (2020), qualitative research is suitable for exploring human experiences, classroom practices, and complex educational processes in real and natural environments. Using this approach, researchers can observe how teachers interact with students, how learning activities take place in the classroom, and how challenges arise and are handled in real time. To guide the research process, this study adopts the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), which views data collection and data analysis as continuous and interconnected activities. According to this model, researchers continuously collect data through interviews, classroom observations, and documentation from schools. Each type of data provides a different perspective: interviews reveal teachers' personal experiences in teaching, observations show how teachers apply strategies in practice, and documents provide written evidence of instructional planning and support.

After the data was collected, it was gathered through interviews, observations, and documentation. These three techniques produced qualitative data, as they generated descriptive information in the form of words, explanations, and classroom behavior—not numerical data. Therefore, the data was analyzed using a qualitative interactive model based on Miles, Haberman, and Saldaña (2018). The final step is to draw conclusions and verify them. At this stage, researchers interpret the meaning of the data and connect the findings to the research questions. Verification is also carried out by rechecking the data from different sources or methods to ensure accuracy. This is reinforced by triangulation, which compares data from interviews, observations, and documents so that the conclusions are more credible and reliable. Through this qualitative and interactive process, the study aims to produce a comprehensive understanding of how teachers develop English language skills in the Special Foreign Language Program and what obstacles they encounter throughout the process.

Research and finding discussion

This study investigates the strategies employed by three English teachers and the obstacles they encounter in developing students' English language skills within the Foreign Language Special Program (FLSP) at SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta. The data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with the three English teachers, supported by classroom observations and documentation. These methods produced descriptive qualitative data rather than numerical data. The findings highlight four key thematic areas related to the obstacles experienced during the implementation process and the effectiveness of interactive teaching techniques.

Obstacles in Developing English Language Skills

Despite the improvements, teachers identified several challenges that hindered optimal skill development.

a. Limited exposure outside the classroom

Teachers noted that students rarely used English beyond classroom activities:

“Students still tend to switch back to Indonesian once the class ends.”
(Teacher 3, Interview, 20 October 2025)

b. Mixed student motivation and proficiency

Differences in motivation and proficiency created difficulties in maintaining balanced lessons:

“Some students progress quickly, while others still struggle with basics.”
(Teacher 2, Interview, 20 October 2025)

c. Limited facilities

Teachers mentioned insufficient audio-visual tools and lack of updated materials as obstacles to interactive activities.

d. Curriculum demands

Teachers felt pressure to complete the required materials, reducing time for communicative learning tasks. These issues align with previous studies indicating that environmental and curricular constraints significantly shape language program effectiveness.

Effectiveness of Interactive Teaching Techniques

All three teachers agreed that interactive methods, including role-plays, presentations, and group tasks, were highly effective in encouraging student participation and communicative competence.

One teacher explained:

“Students become much more active during group presentations or role-play activities.”
(Teacher 1, Interview, 20 October 2025)

Observations showed that these methods increased student engagement but required extensive preparation time. Some students also displayed hesitation due to low confidence, particularly in speaking tasks.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to understand how teachers in the Special Foreign Language Program at Muhammadiyah 1 High School in Surakarta develop students' English language skills, while also identifying the obstacles they face during the learning process. From the description in the proposal, it can be concluded that teachers play a very important role in determining the success of English language learning, especially since students in Indonesia rarely use English outside of class. The Special Foreign Language Program offers a more intensive learning experience, but still faces various challenges such as differences in student motivation, limited facilities, insufficient time, and curriculum demands.

Nevertheless, teachers continue to implement various strategies to support the learning process, such as task-based learning (TBL.T), cooperative learning, repeated practice, project-based learning, and other communicative approaches to help students improve their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. These strategies become more effective when tailored to the needs of students and the classroom situation. Obstacles that arise both inside and outside the classroom require teachers to continue to adapt. Limited facilities, lack of exposure to English in the students' environment, and

differences in individual abilities are factors that influence the learning process. Therefore, this study is important because it can provide a realistic picture of what is going well, what are still obstacles, and how teachers can develop more effective learning strategies in the future. Overall, this study is expected to serve as a reference for teachers, schools, and other parties to improve the quality of English language learning programs, especially in intensive learning environments such as the Special Foreign Language Program.

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