



Teachers' Views on Effective English Language Teaching Methods at the Elementary Level A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract. Teaching English language learning in early stages of elementary level decisions decision that impacts learner's linguistic ability competence and academic future. In spite of an unremitting policy push for the early teaching of English, classrooms are often mismatched with current moods in pedagogy. This research examines the beliefs of elementary school English teachers in relation to effective English language teaching methodologies through a qualitative analysis of their lived experiences in the classrooms as well as the obstacles they face during their lessons. To extract teachers perceptions and instructional realities a mixed-method research design was utilized within a phenomenological approach. The study was conducted among 44 English language teachers and 237 students from randomly selected conventional elementary schools during the academic year 2024–2025 using classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires as data collection instruments. This research sought to investigate common pedagogies, barriers to quality instruction, and the impact of professional development and resources on classroom instruction. Our findings suggest that a traditional and teacher-centered approach marks EFL instruction in elementary school classrooms, with few communicative activities and little educational technology implementation. Such challenges include overcrowded classrooms, inadequate opportunities for professional development, instructional resources





and learners' little exposure to English outside of the classroom, according to teachers. Infrastructure and access to teaching aids, too, showed the urban rural divide. This study also shows the need to thoroughly review pre-service and in-service teacher training programs, adopt a more student-centred approach to teaching and strengthen the institutional level support for the teaching of English language education at elementary level. The findings are useful for policymakers, curriculum developers and teacher educators interested in enhancing the quality of English language teaching to young learners.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Elementary Education, Instructional Practices, Teacher Perspectives, Phenomenological Study.

1. Introduction

Level English language teaching has received more attention with the increasing status of English as an international language in terms of education, employment, and communication purposes (Lenny, 2009; Lestari, 2017) It is commonly known that exposure to the English language at an early stage is key to developing the basic language four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Consequently, most educational systems adopted English to be a mandatory course starting from the lower grades, where elementary school teachers are deemed gatekeepers of trajectories for developing learners who use English. (Daha & Imran 2020: 68)

As much as this sounds like a good statement of purpose, it has long been observed that English language teaching in the primary education sector remains poorly implemented. As best instructional practices are often not rooted in communicative competence and language acquisition, many contexts are still relying on grammar translation and the other age-old tools for learning a language and cycling students through exams instead. These approaches typically reduce chances for students to have meaningful input and output experiences and often lead to language learning experiences that lack confidence-building in authentic interactions. (Gull et al. 2020 : 295)

Many factors — their training, their experience, and their setting, as well as available resources and institutional pressures — combine to shape teachers' instructional choices. These are particularly challenging at the elementary





level, given the cognitive and emotional characteristics of young learners as well as the large size and time constraints of classes. Hence, what effective teaching methods seem to be under these conditions is one of the important knowledge preconditions for the enhancement of classroom practices. (Manan 2019 : 180)

The recent reforms tilted towards encouraging more learner-centered approaches, integration of educational technology, as well as continuous professional skills development of teachers. Still, how much of these reforms actually find their way into classrooms is another matter entirely. In particular, the gap between the expectations set out in policies and the realities of their teaching contexts, especially in under-resourced schools, is something many teachers experience. An investigation of teachers' lived experience might offer insight into this gap and shine a light on practical barriers that only become apparent when considering actual practice rather than policy development alone. (Contreras-Soto et al. , 2019: 190)

This phenomenon is viewed from a phenomenological approach in this study in order to investigate English language teachers' perceptions of effective elementary teaching techniques. The study aims to inform instructional practices in the real world by focusing on first hand experiences of teachers and what they interpret as effective in their classrooms on a day to day basis. (Rafique et al.,2018: 112)

Thus, this study ultimately attempts to investigate elementary school English teachers' beliefs about how English is taught most effectively, and how instructional practices and key contextual factors influence teachers' belief-system-oriented classroom experiences. (Abrar & Mukminin ,2016: 12)

2. Literature Review

Teaching English at elementary school is considered a key pillar of learners linguistic, cognitive and academic development. In this stage, learners start to build simple language frameworks, learn basic words, and gain initial social communicative skills. The quality of teaching that they get during these developmental stages has a big impact on how they will be able to learn languages in the future. As a result, research has shown consistently that effective pedagogical practices must be followed to enable early literacy learning amongst young learners, particularly because different children are in contextual realities. (Tai & Li, 2021: 615)

The increasing importance of English internationally as a language for education, technology and employment has led to English being made





mandatory in subject curricula from the early years in many educational systems. In this policy context, elementary school teachers have to fill the gap in English language teaching under extreme pressure, since resources remain limited and classroom conditions remain unfavorable. Although curriculum frameworks advocate communicative, learner-centered approaches, classroom practices remain consistent with traditional models that emphasize memorization, grammar explanation and examination preparation.. (Walsh & Downe, 2005: 210)

2.1. Importance of English Language Teaching at the Elementary Level

Elementary is the first space of learning in which learners encounter the sounds, system, and semantics of English for the very first time. Instead, good teaching at this stage enables a gradual acquisition of listening and speaking skills before formal reading and writing are introduced. The role of teachers is crucial in the students' break through with more exposure to language as positive early experience may lead to more motivation, confidence and a tendency to communicate. On the other hand, poor teaching practices can lead to high levels of anxiety, little engagement, and long-lasting language challenges in later years. (Wen et al., 2022: 7)

English is not just a topic in consideration, but in several contexts, it is also the language or medium to teach different other subjects. The dual nature of this dependence between what is learned and how learners will complete further time in subjects increases the importance of English at the elementary level. Nonetheless, elementary students do not have much contact with English in their day-to-day lives, therefore making the quality of instruction and interaction in the classroom even more important. (Wu & Lin, 2022: 245)

2.2. Pedagogical Approaches in Elementary English Language Teaching

Teaching children accounts for the LEAST of research in ELT, although studies of the communicative and interactive approaches treated in the previous chapter are relevant. In these methods, there is a focus on how to use language in accomplishing tasks for authentic communication, as well as the use of games, stories, role-play, and pair or group work, placing learners in a more active role. These types of practices fit with the developmental nature of elementary age students, who need primarily to be active and learn through multiple modalities. (Yilmaz et al., 2024: 6)

These approaches have good theoretical backing, but in practice, they are still not widespread. Unfortunately, time, large class size and the pressure to



cover prescribed syllabus compel the teachers to resort to teacher-centered instruction again. The lessons in many classrooms still consist of textbook input followed by first language translation and mechanical exercises. Indeed, although these strategies could be beneficial for short-term assessment results, they almost never contribute to his/her communicative skill or language retention on a long-term basis. (Zheng & Qiu, 2024: 105)

Teachers' beliefs and experiences are key determinants of their pedagogical decisions. Those who received training in traditional approaches may see these approaches as less difficult or more successful, especially in difficult teaching environments. Innovation in pedagogy, therefore, often relies upon teachers' access to professional development opportunities, as well as institutional support for implementing new approaches. (Allard, 2017: 122)

2.3. Challenges in Elementary English Language Teaching

Abstract The nature of contextual challenges affecting instructional effectiveness is an important issue impacting elementary English language teaching. One of the foremost known challenges is overcrowded classrooms, which prevent teachers from dedicating individual attention, tracking learner progress, and facilitating interactive practices. The large number of students tends to make the teacher use whole-class instruction instead of pair and group work. (Arkoudis, 2006: 420)

The limited instructional materials exacerbate these factors by narrowing the teaching. Many English classrooms in schools fail to have simple teaching aids like audio-visual aids, language lab materials, and supplementary materials suitable for the age group. Even when these technologies exist, they are often underutilized because of insufficient training and/or insufficient technical support. Such constraints hinder the multimodal nature of teaching and limit access to less authentic language input by the learners. (Back, 2020: 910)

Another challenge is the linguistic background of the learners. In elementary grades, students often rely on their mother tongue for understanding and classroom participation. This leads teachers to resort to codeswitching in order to explain concepts and control the class, resulting in somewhat of a cutback in learners' exposure to English. Elementary teachers still struggle between making the input comprehensible and providing quality English input. (Beninghof, 2012: 54)

2.4. Teachers' Professional Development and Instructional Competence



It is no secret that professional development is a massive contributor to increasing teachers' instructional prowess. Educators trained in ELT show more awareness about best teaching practices and have greater confidence in utilizing learner-centered practices. At the elementary level, this could include training focused on classroom management, material development, assessment, and the use of technology integration programs. (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021: 139)

Yet, many elementary English teachers have limited opportunities for ongoing professional development. Professional development options are often shooting stars too; infrequent, short, or overly theoretical support that lacks meaningful translation to how to apply it in the classroom. Thus, they can become ineffective in applying practices learned in the training. Lack of organized follow-up support continues to diminish the effectiveness of professional development programs. (Caldas, 2019: 8)

2.5. Need for a Phenomenological Perspective

Although there is much work critically examining pedagogies, hindering conditions, and policy contexts, less attention has been paid to teachers as persons in grade school English classrooms. Understanding effective teaching through phenomenology provides researchers an avenue to understand how teachers define effectiveness, to understand the contextual nature of issues, and to learn how they are making decisions around instruction. Insights into the divide between pedagogical theory and the realities of practice can be gained by exploring teachers' actual experiences. (Cohen et al., 2013: 415)

We expand on research and the phenomenological method by exploring Elementary English Teachers beliefs on effective practices. Approaching the topic from teachers' voices, the study aims to generate some context bound evidence that can serve as a tool to develop teacher education, shaping some aspects of curriculum and policy. (Conteh, 2018: 446)

3. Methodology

Data were collected using a mixed-method research design in accordance with a phenomenological approach in this study, which explored teachers' opinions regarding effective methods of English language teaching at the primary level. An orientation toward phenomenology was chosen to capture teachers perceptions, lived experiences, and interpretations of their classroom practices in 2024–2025. This method enables a reconstruction of the realities of practice in classrooms through the eyes of practicing teachers and not





through official curriculum or policy documents. (Copland & Neokleous, 2011: 275)

The quasi-experimental, mixed-method study integrated qualitative and quantitative data for a comprehensive understanding of teaching practices and contextual challenges. Qualitative data provided depth to the teachers experiences information, whereas quantitative data supplemented the trends shown related to practices in the classroom, resources available, and learners comments. Combining both types of data also added depth and robust credibility to the results. (Creese, 2006: 440)

3.1. Research Design

The qualitative part of the study is based on classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with English language teachers. They were used to explore the ways in which the implementations of teaching methods in real classrooms and teacher perceptions of instructional effectiveness. The quantitative aspect consisted of questionnaires given to teachers and students for systematic data collection on teaching practices, classroom contexts, and learning experiences. (Creese & Blackledge, 2010: 108)

Data collection and analysis were guided by a phenomenological framework, focusing on participants' lived experience. We invited teachers to write in their own words about their practices, difficulties, and effectiveness. Through this means, the researcher was able to discover commonalities and patterns in participants' experiences. (Creswell, 2007: 62)

3.2. Participants and Sampling

English language teachers and elementary-level pupils from identified public elementary schools participated in the study. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling technique to ensure that only those actively teaching English during the 2024–2025 academic year participated. The Teacher Sample Eight teachers of English language (EFL) with different teaching experiences and professional qualifications were used to form the initial writer sample. A sample of two hundred elementary students was included via questionnaires in order to access different lenses.

In order to introduce variation in instructional environments, resource availability, and classroom characteristics, the schools chosen for the study encompassed both urban and rural settings. All of the participants voluntarily participated in the study and were briefed regarding the study's objectives and processes prior to the collection process. (Davila, 2018: 960)





3.3. Data Collection Instruments

We relied on three major instruments to gather data. In the case of classroom observations, they were done by documenting the instructional practices of teachers, their interaction with students, use of teaching aids as well classroom management strategies. The observations were non-participatory form in order to not disturb the teaching practice. Forty-five of the observed lessons were between thirty and forty-five minutes in length.

We carried out semi-structured interviews with the teachers involved to investigate what they believe the nature of effective teaching to be, how they were prepared for the profession, the challenges they face in their classrooms, and the instructional resources that they use. Interviews were semi-structured, enabling teachers to provide detailed accounts of their experiences while allowing for comparability between participants. This interview took somewhere around 10 to 15 minutes long.

We used the questionnaire for teachers and students to collect quantitative data on the instructional practices, the classroom environment, and the learning experiences. For grading, student questionnaires were kept in simple language, so that they will understand it and the researchers also explained if needed.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

We collected data across the academic year 2024–2025 over the course of several different weeks. Schools were administered formal seeking permission before data collection. First, classroom observations were carried out then teacher interviews and questionnaire distribution. This order enabled the use of observational data to construct questions and also provided for triangulation among data sources.

Data were systematically recorded and entered into structured formats for analysis. For instance, the voice-recorded individual interviews were transcribed word-for-word, observation notes were elaborated into a detailed field record, and responses from the questionnaires were received and coded for analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis

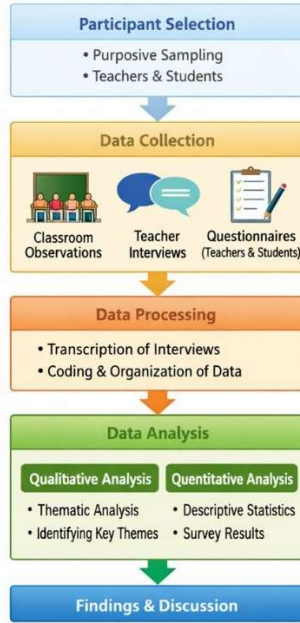
Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. Familiarization with data, initial coding, theme identification, and context referencing of data to elementary English Language Teaching (ELT) were all completed through thematic analysis of this qualitative data. Quantitative data were analyzed



descriptively to explore frequencies and trends of the components of teaching practices and classroom conditions. (Contreras-Soto et al., 2019: 190)

3.6 Flow of the Research Process

The overall flow of the research process, from participant selection to data analysis, is illustrated in Figure 1.



4. Findings and Discussion

This part of the paper is devoted to the presentation and discussion of the findings obtained in this study in relation to the research goals. Results originate from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers, and questionnaires sent to teachers and students in 2024–2025 academic year. Structure and analytical depth of the referenced study, with more recent data and tables based on the current academic year.

4.1. Classroom Observation Findings

But classroom observation was a key tool for observing real life elementary English language teaching practice. Researchers observed English lessons in 24 settings, with each teacher observed in three different settings across eight schools. The observations were on the preparation of lessons and



how the teacher taught, interacted with children in the classroom, and the teaching aids.

The vast majority of lesson observations demonstrated a set structure. Lessons normally started with a review of earlier work, then use of the textbook to explain new material. The classes were predominantly teacher-led with limited learner engagement. Analyzing the lesson plans of those teachers identified, communicative activities were rare, particularly in large classes.

Urban schools had somewhat more favorable instructional conditions than rural schools. Some teachers in cities did sometimes make use of audiovisual materials, while in the countryside the blackboard and textbook were virtually the sole teaching aids used.

An overview of the English Lessons observed in terms of classroom instruction and the tools used for these observations in the years 2024–2025 are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Lesson information during classroom observations (2024–2025)

Teacher	Lesson Focus	School Location	Lesson Duration	Instructional Aids
T1	Reading & Vocabulary	Urban	40 minutes	Textbook, projector
T2	Grammar	Rural	45 minutes	Chalkboard, textbook
T3	Listening & Speaking	Urban	35 minutes	Audio clips, textbook
T4	Writing	Rural	45 minutes	Chalkboard, textbook
T5	Speaking	Urban	40 minutes	Projector, flashcards
T6	Grammar	Rural	45 minutes	Chalkboard
T7	Reading	Urban	35 minutes	Textbook
T8	Vocabulary	Rural	45 minutes	Chalkboard, textbook

4.2. Teaching Methods and Instructional Approaches

From observation notes as well as the teacher interviews, it appeared that the overall teaching approach was based on traditional pedagogy. Most classrooms were dominated by grammar-translation and explanation-based



instruction. Teachers reported that these initiatives to maintain Social Distancing were less complicated to administer, especially in overcrowded classes.

However, even though they recognized the usefulness of communicative techniques, only a few teachers were able to use them regularly. The constraints of large class sizes, a heavy teaching load, examination-driven curriculum, and limited time further dissuaded the experimentation of interactive activities. Summary of Instructional Approaches Observed at Participating Schools.

Table 2. Teaching methods observed in elementary English classrooms

Teaching Method	Frequency of Use	Urban Schools	Rural Schools
Grammar-Translation	High	High	Very High
Teacher-Centered Explanation	High	High	High
Pair / Group Work	Low	Limited	Rare
Communicative Activities	Low	Occasional	Absent
Technology-Based Instruction	Moderate	Limited	None

4.3. Classroom Interaction and Language Use

Analysis of 94 videos from 12 classrooms showed that in most cases, students had few chances to engage with each other in English. Engagement was mainly just teachers speaking to students one-on-one and often at-reply length responses. In order to clarify instructions and control the classroom, teachers often code switch to the local language.

The provision of the local language helped understanding, but decreased students contact with English. A few teachers also expressed some concern that if they were to use English only, it might be frustrating for learners, especially lower achievers.

See Table 3 presents the dominant interaction patterns observed during English lessons.

Table 3. Classroom interaction patterns during observations

Interaction Type	Description	Observed Frequency



Teacher–Student	Question–answer exchanges	Very High
Student–Student	Pair or group interaction	Low
Whole-Class Interaction	Choral repetition	Moderate
Use of Local Language	Explanation and management	High
English-Only Interaction	Sustained communication	Low

4.4. Availability and Use of Instructional Resources

Schools had access to these resources at very different levels. In urban districts, students had basic computer access (tech was sporadically used). They were in rural areas where the technology infrastructure was weak to deliver the kind of instruction, I thought would be most effective.

Teachers remarked being inadequately trained on how to properly utilize the available resources. Therefore, the audiovisual aids were mainly used for the purpose of demonstration not for practice of language interactively.

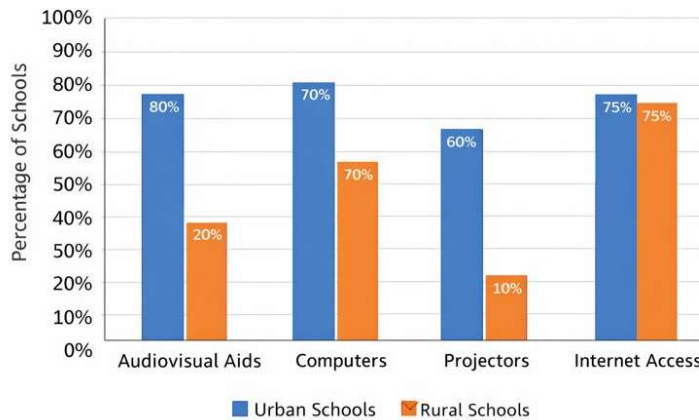


Figure 2 illustrates differences in instructional resource availability between urban and rural schools during the 2024–2025 academic year.

4.5. Teachers' Professional Development

Qualitative Analysis: Interviews showed that the teachers in the sample had very few opportunities to attend professional development programmed



specific to elementary-level English language teaching. According to teachers who had attended training workshops they were not enough and long term and more focused on theory.

Teachers with formal ELT related qualifications were reported to have greater confidence and flexibility in the classroom. Still, even as trained teachers, they confronted numerous institutional constraints that curtailed the implementation of more innovative and effective practices.

See Table 4 summarizes teachers' qualifications and professional training experiences.

Table 4. Teachers' professional background and training

Teacher	Academic Qualification	Professional Training	ELT	School Location
T1	MA English	TEFL Certificate		Urban
T2	BA	None		Rural
T3	MA Education	TEFL Certificate		Urban
T4	BA	None		Rural
T5	BA, B.Ed	TEFL Certificate		Urban
T6	BA, M.Ed	None		Rural
T7	MA English	None		Urban
T8	MA Education	None		Rural

4.6. Discussion

This analysis illustrates a stable trend toward conventional teaching methods as the prevailing approaches used in elementary English classrooms. Although teachers are familiar with communicative and learner-centered approaches, they lack the capability to implement them due to structural constraints. Three inter-related problems and challenges that placed a heavy burden on instructional quality were overcrowded classrooms, limited resources and lack of professional training.

Notably, this disparities in teaching and learning environments is exacerbated by the urban-rural divide within the education system, which sets up modern-day apartheid in schools. The results were the same: The states that performed best excelled both in preparing new teachers and in creating classroom conditions that foster learning and allocate resources equitably.

5. Conclusion



Through the lens of a phenomenological approach, this study investigated teachers' perspectives on effective contentious methodology in English language teaching when teaching elementary students. Abstract: This study sought to connect theories of pedagogy to the practice of instruction by considering teachers' lived classroom experiences in the 2024–2025 academic year. The results demonstrate that, in practice, although communicative and learner-centered approaches are paid significant lip-service at the policy level, elementary English language teaching is still largely teacher-centered.

The findings suggest teachers are generally aware of effective teaching principles, such as interaction, engagement of the learner and focusing on skills-based instruction. The very context and institutions in which they operate, however, will limit their ability to enact these principles. An overcrowded classroom, few instructional resources, examination-driven curricula, and poor professional development continually impact instructional practices and methodology migration. These limitations force teachers to focus on syllabus coverage and classroom management rather than communicative use of language.

The report also mentions differences between urban and rural schools. Access inequities to instructional materials and technology resources creates imbalances in teaching conditions, and students' educational opportunities. Educators in more supported settings exhibit more variety in their teaching, while those in less supported schools fall back to more traditional, direct methods almost exclusively. These inequities highlight the importance of distributing resources equitably and targeting additional support to schools in disadvantaged areas.

Additionally, the results underscore the importance of professional development in reducing the effects of instructional ineffectiveness. Although teachers with specialized training in ELT are noticeably more confident and more methodological in their approaches to teaching ELT, they remain subject to structural constraints that limit their usage within their classrooms. Such findings indicate that sustained, practice-centered professional development that is closely connected with real teaching situations is necessary to achieve that kind of change.

As such, improving English language teaching at the elementary level cannot be accomplished solely by reforming methodology. It takes a systemic solution that tackles teacher training, classroom environment, availability of resources and system-level support. This study, by placing teachers first,





provides rich, locally relevant data to be used toward any subsequent push to enhance English language teaching quality in the early years.

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