

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

The implementation of English language learning at the elementary school level in Indonesia has undergone several policy changes over time. During the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum (K13), English was no longer a compulsory subject in elementary schools. This policy limited early exposure to English learning, even though early language learning is considered important for building foundational communication skills. However, with the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum in 2021, English has been reintroduced as an optional subject at the elementary level. This policy shift reflects a growing awareness of the importance of early foreign language learning in response to global educational demands. It also highlights the need to provide appropriate learning experiences for young learners, particularly those who are just beginning formal English instruction. At the elementary level, especially for students aged around nine to ten years old, English learning requires approaches that are aligned with their cognitive and social development. At this stage, students are still developing their ability to interact socially and construct meaning through communication with others. Therefore, language learning is not only about individual understanding, but also about how students learn through interaction. This condition emphasizes the importance of collaborative

learning as an instructional approach that allows students to engage actively in meaningful communication with their peers.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of interaction in language learning. Oliver and Azkarai (2019) found that ESL learners aged nine to twelve years old tend to engage in collaborative interaction regardless of their language proficiency levels. Their study showed that students often demonstrate joint engagement and shared responsibility in completing tasks, which supports language development through negotiation of meaning and knowledge construction. This indicates that peer interaction plays an important role in facilitating meaningful language use among young learners.

In addition, Hidalgo (2021) stated that older children tend to show greater sensitivity toward their peers compared to younger children. This suggests that as students grow older, their ability to participate in collaborative learning improves, particularly in understanding social dynamics within group interactions. This development supports the effectiveness of collaborative learning in promoting communication and cooperation among students. Furthermore, Kos (2025) emphasized that collaborative learning not only contributes to academic achievement but also develops students' social and cooperative skills. It creates a supportive learning environment where students can exchange ideas, provide emotional support, and reduce anxiety in using a foreign language.

However, despite its benefits, the implementation of collaborative learning is not without challenges. Differences in students' participation levels, abilities, and emotional readiness often affect group dynamics in the classroom. Some students may actively participate in discussions, while others tend to be passive and rely heavily on their peers. This imbalance may reduce the effectiveness of group work if not properly managed. Therefore, the role of the teacher becomes crucial in organizing, guiding, and facilitating collaborative activities to ensure equal participation among students. Moreover, the implementation of collaborative learning in the classroom also requires careful consideration of time management, task design, and student characteristics. Without appropriate instructional strategies, collaborative activities may not run effectively, especially in classrooms with young learners who still require structured guidance and support. These conditions indicate that although collaborative learning has strong theoretical foundations, its classroom implementation largely depends on teacher competence and adaptability to classroom realities

Therefore, this study focuses on examining how collaborative learning is implemented in elementary EFL classrooms, particularly in relation to teacher practices, student engagement, and the challenges encountered during the learning process. Understanding these aspects is essential to gain deeper insight into how collaborative learning can be effectively applied to young learners in real classroom contexts.

As stated in the Quran, Al-Ma'idah, verse 2:

وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَىٰ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ

وَالْعُدْوَانِ

This verse contains a command from Allah SWT to humanity to cooperate with one another in matters that lead to righteousness (al-birr) and piety (at-taqwa), as well as a prohibition against cooperating in matters that lead to evil, sin, and hostility. In the context of social life, this verse affirms that cooperation is not only permitted but encouraged as long as it has a positive purpose and benefits others. The core value emphasized is collaboration grounded in moral principles and shared responsibility. When applied to the field of education, particularly in this study, this verse aligns with the concept of collaborative learning. In collaborative learning, students are encouraged to help one another, share knowledge, and work together to achieve learning objectives. This aligns with the command to practice ta'awun (mutual assistance) in the pursuit of good.

Through such collaboration, students not only learn academically but also develop social skills such as empathy, responsibility, and mutual respect. However, this verse also reminds us that collaboration must be properly guided by teachers to prevent negative behaviors such as excessive dependence, conflict, or injustice within the group. Thus, this verse serves as a foundation that collaboration in learning is not merely a teaching strategy, but also holds spiritual and ethical values that support the creation of a positive, harmonious, and meaningful learning environment. Although

many studies have highlighted the importance of collaboration in English language learning for children, there is still a limited understanding of the real challenges the teacher face in managing diverse learning groups, especially in overcoming differences in age and proficiency levels that affect the effectiveness of collaboration and learning outcomes. Many studies have not deeply discussed how teacher struggle to balance group dynamics, reduce student anxiety, and ensure active participation from all students in the classroom. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by exploring how English teacher face and manage these challenges in creating effective collaborative learning in EYL classrooms.

B. Definition of Key Terms

To ensure clarity and consistency in understanding the concepts used in this study, this section provides the definitions of several key terms relevant to the research.

1. Guiding

Guidance refers to the process by which teachers provide direction, support, and facilitation to students during the learning process, particularly in collaborative English language learning activities. In this study, guidance encompasses the teacher's role in providing clear instructions, organizing group work, monitoring student interactions, and offering assistance when needed. In addition, guiding also includes emotional support to help students feel more confident and comfortable participating in class. Through

effective guidance, teachers help ensure that all students are actively engaged and able to contribute meaningfully to the learning process.

2. Young Minds

In this study, the term “young minds” refers to elementary school students, specifically those aged around nine to ten years old, who are at a critical stage of cognitive, social, emotional, and language development. At this developmental stage, children are in the process of transitioning from early childhood to more structured formal education, where they begin to develop more complex thinking skills, although they are still highly dependent on concrete experiences and direct interaction with their environment. Students at this age are generally characterized by high curiosity, active engagement, and responsiveness to interactive and engaging learning environments. Furthermore, children at this stage tend to learn more effectively through social interaction, collaboration, and meaningful engagement with peers rather than through passive learning methods. They often require opportunities to express ideas, ask questions, and negotiate meaning with others in order to construct their understanding.

3. Shaping

Shaping is understood as the teacher’s efforts to influence and develop students’ behavior, attitudes, and participation in the learning process. In this study, shaping refers to how teachers guide students to become more active, cooperative, and responsible during collaborative learning activities. This includes encouraging positive interactions,

promoting equal participation among group members, and helping students build confidence in using English. Through consistent guidance and structured activities, teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' learning experiences and social skills.

4. Young Learners

In the context of this study, “young learners” refers to elementary school students, specifically third graders, who are beginning to learn English as a foreign language. Students at this stage generally have a limited vocabulary and are still developing basic language skills, so they greatly need support from teachers as well as an interactive learning approach. They tend to be more responsive to learning that is engaging, collaborative, and activity-based. Therefore, collaborative learning is an appropriate approach to support language development while enhancing students' confidence and participation in the classroom.

B. Research Questions

Based on the issues discussed in the background, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does English teacher support collaboration among young learners
2. What challenges do teachers face when implementing collaborative learning among young learners in English classrooms?

C. Objectives of Study

The objectives of the study function as a framework that directs the focus and scope of this research.

1. To examine how teachers support collaboration among young learners to enhance the English learning process, including managing social interactions and providing emotional guidance.
2. To identify and analyze the challenges teachers face in facilitating collaborative English learning, such as handling group dynamics, skill gaps, and learner anxiety.

D. Significance of Study

This section presents the significance of the study, outlining the potential contributions of the research findings to theory and practice.

For students, the results of this study are expected to benefit students while learning with collaboration to improve their English language skills by reduce anxiety, increase self-confidence and create a supportive learning environment. With collaboration students can developing important social skills while learning English.

1. For Teachers, the collaborative activities can be used in the classroom especially in young learner classes to help teacher design inclusive lesson plans to encourage active participation and maximize student learning outcomes by understanding the role of age, skill level and anxiety.

2. For readers, the findings of this study are expected to help readers to know the effectiveness of collaborative activities and the role of social emotional dynamics in the learning process that can help young learners to learn English without feeling anxiety in class.
3. For researchers, hopefully this research can be a reference for researchers further research on teacher strategies and classroom challenges in implementing collaborative learning, especially in contexts involving young learners with diverse abilities.