



Elementary School Teachers' Instructional Ability in Teaching English: A Case Study in an Urban Context

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-04-07 Revised: 2026-05-19 Accepted: 2026-09-16 Keywords: <i>English for Young Learner; Teachers' Instructional Ability; Elementary School; English Language Teaching; Professional Development</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.11802 Corresponding Author: Sabrina Rahmadani sabrinarahmadani2910@gmail. com Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. DR. HAMKA, Jakarta	<i>The growing implementation of English in Indonesian primary schools has increased the need for teachers who can provide effective English for Young Learners (EYL) instruction. While previous studies have examined teachers' qualifications and self-reported competence, less is known about how instructional ability is demonstrated in actual classroom practice. This study explores how teachers' instructional ability is manifested in urban primary EYL classrooms and the factors that support or hinder it. A qualitative case study was conducted with four English teachers from four public primary schools in Jakarta. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations and analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. The findings show that instructional ability was demonstrated through responsive lesson planning, developmentally appropriate classroom management, interactive teaching methods, and purposeful use of instructional media. Teachers' practices were shaped by professional learning, student engagement, and school resources. When resources were limited, teachers relied on additional personal effort and family support to sustain instruction. The study highlights instructional ability as a multidimensional and context-dependent practice and emphasizes the need for sustained professional development and equitable instructional resources for effective EYL teaching.</i>

1. Introduction

The quality of English for Young Learners (EYL) instruction depends less on what teachers are certified to know than on what they are able to do with that knowledge in front of a class of children (Garton & Copland, 2019). Teaching English at the elementary level requires developmentally appropriate pedagogy, sustain classroom interaction, and meaningful learning experiences, and therefore demands not only adequate English proficiency but also the pedagogical judgement needed to respond to young learners' cognitive, social, and emotional characteristics (Huang, 2023). This study takes instructional ability as its central construct and distinguishes it deliberately from three adjacent terms that are often used interchangeably in the literature. *Competence* refers to the certified or assessed attributes a teacher is presumed to hold; *proficiency* refers to command of English as a language system; and *teacher cognition* refers to the beliefs, knowledge, and reasoning that underlie instructional decisions (Borg, 2006). Instructional ability as used here is the enactment that connect them: the observable translation of what teachers know and believe into lesson planning, classroom management, method selection, and media use within a particular classroom (Richards, 2017; Shulman, 1987). This distinction is not merely terminological. If ability is defined as enactment, it cannot be inferred from qualifications, test scores, or self-report; it has to be examined where it takes place.

Two bodies of theory inform this framing. (Shulman, 1987) concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) describes the specialized knowledge through which teachers transform subject matter into forms that learners can access — representations, analogies, sequencing decisions, and anticipations of learner difficulty. PCK is distinctive in EYL because the content is a language that learners cannot yet use to receive instruction about it, so transformation must occur through visual support, routine, gesture, and play rather than through explanation. Teacher cognition research (Borg, 2006) complements this by showing that the knowledge teachers draw on is filtered through beliefs formed during their own schooling, training, and accumulated classroom experience, and that stated beliefs and observed practice frequently diverge. Recent Indonesian work has established associations between EFL teachers' pedagogical beliefs, PCK, and their use of instructional materials (Almunawaroh, 2025; Almunawaroh et al., 2024), but has done so largely through scales and self-report, leaving the point at which cognition becomes practice unexamined. Read together, PCK and teacher cognition suggest that instructional ability is neither a fixed attribute nor a purely behavioural repertoire, but a situated accomplishment: knowledge and belief realized — and sometimes constrained — under the conditions of a specific classroom and school.

Those conditions are not neutral, and urban schools present a distinctive configuration of them that warrants theorization rather than mere identification. Four characteristics make urban EYL teaching analytically different. First, urban

schools sit at the centre of professional development infrastructure, with access to teacher forums, university partnerships, and digital platforms that teachers in peripheral regions cannot reach; constraints observed in urban classrooms therefore cannot be attributed simply to an absence of training opportunity. Second, urban classrooms are internally heterogeneous in a way that rural classrooms typically are not, because out-of-school exposure to English — private courses, tutoring, digital media, and English-using households — is unevenly distributed within the same class, making differentiation a central rather than incidental pedagogical demand. Third, large class sizes combine with elevated parental and institutional expectations, raising the stakes of classroom management and increasing the visibility of teachers' instructional decisions. Fourth, curriculum policy is implemented earliest and most fully in urban schools, which makes them the front line at which national EYL policy is converted into classroom practice. Framed this way, the urban setting becomes an analytic condition rather than a sampling decision: it is precisely where the resource-scarcity explanation for weak EYL instruction is weakest, and where pedagogical and cognitive explanations therefore become visible.

Indonesian research has documented uneven EYL provision consistently, but has examined it in ways that leave the enactment question open. (Zein, 2014) traced the problem to pre-service policy and the deployment of teachers without English education backgrounds; (Albustomi et al., 2024) reported teacher unpreparedness in East Lombok, attributing it to limited training and weak school support; (Dewi & Haryanti, 2023) identified a pedagogical competence gap between teachers with and without English education backgrounds; and (Rohqim, 2020) and (Arlinda et al., 2024) pointed to restricted professional development and inadequate instructional resources. These studies converge, but their convergence is partly an artefact of shared design, and three limitations follow. First, unpreparedness is largely inferred from what teachers report rather than from what they do, so the field knows considerably more about teachers' accounts of their ability than about its realization in lessons. Second, educational background is treated as a proxy for practice; the assumption that a non-English-background teacher teaches less capably is seldom tested against observed classroom instruction. Third, because these studies are concentrated in peripheral or resource-constrained settings, scarcity absorbs most of the explanatory burden, and it remains unclear what accounts for variation in instructional ability where training and resources are comparatively available.

International EYL scholarship offers a comparative frame that the Indonesian literature has not fully drawn on. Multi-country research has shown that differentiation, class size, and the gap between curriculum policy and classroom reality recur across very different national systems, indicating that such difficulties are structural features of EYL teaching rather than symptoms of local underdevelopment (Garton & Copland, 2019). (Garton & Tekin, 2020) argue that EYL teaching quality is best understood through observed pedagogy rather than

credentials. Read alongside the Indonesian evidence, this literature strengthens the case for examining enactment in a well-resourced urban setting, where resource scarcity cannot serve as a default explanation.

This study therefore adopts a conceptual framework in which instructional ability is positioned as the mediating point between four interacting elements: teacher knowledge and cognition (PCK, pedagogical beliefs, educational background, teaching experience); instructional practice (lesson planning, classroom management, teaching methods, instructional media); student factors (proficiency spread, engagement, confidence in using English); and school context (professional development, learning resources, facilities, institutional support). Knowledge and cognition are enacted as practice; practice is shaped by student response and is enabled or constrained by school conditions; and the resulting classroom experience feeds back into teachers' cognition.

What previous studies have not shown is how this enactment actually occurs — how teachers convert pedagogical knowledge into moment-to-moment instructional decisions, and which contextual factors intervene at the point of enactment rather than at the point of preparation. Addressing that gap requires observing classrooms alongside interviewing teachers, in a setting where preparation and resources are comparatively adequate. This study accordingly examines four English teachers in public elementary schools in Jakarta and addresses the following research questions: (1) How is teachers' instructional ability manifested in English teaching at elementary schools in an urban context? (2) What factors support or hinder teachers' ability to teach English in elementary schools?

2. Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design (Sharan B. Merriam, 2016) to examine elementary school teachers' ability in teaching English. The case was defined as the enactment of EYL instructional ability within the bounded context of public elementary schools in a single metropolitan area, Jakarta, with the four participating teachers treated as embedded units of analysis within that case. A case study design was appropriate because the research questions are concerned with *how* instructional ability is enacted within a real-life context over which the researcher has no control, and because the phenomenon cannot be meaningfully separated from the school conditions in which it occurs. A qualitative approach more broadly was suited to the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of teachers' instructional practices, pedagogical decision-making, and classroom experiences in authentic EYL settings (John W. Creswell, 2023).

Setting and Participants

The participants were four elementary school English teachers, each teaching

at a different public elementary school in Jakarta. Recruiting one teacher per school was a deliberate design decision: it allowed instructional ability to be observed against four distinct sets of institutional conditions — different facilities leadership arrangements, and student intakes — rather than against a single school culture, thereby strengthening the contextual scope of the case.

Participants were recruited through criterion-based purposive sampling (Sharan B. Merriam, 2016). Four inclusion criteria were applied: (a) currently holding responsibility for teaching English at the elementary level in a Jakarta public school; (b) a minimum of two years of English teaching experience at that level, so that participants had sufficient classroom experience to reflect on their instructional decisions; (c) teaching English across more than one grade level, allowing instructional adaptation to different learner ages to be observed; and (d) willingness to permit classroom observation in addition to interview. Recruitment stopped at four teachers once the criteria of maximum institutional variation had been met and the interview and observation data had begun to yield repetition rather than new categories.

The decision to involve four participant was based on the depth and relevance of the information obtained rather than on the notion of data saturation, which may not be fully applicable to a bounded case study (Malterud et al., 2016). This decision was supported by several considerations. The study addressed focused research questions and drew on established frameworks of PCK and teacher cognition. In addition, the participants were selected from different school context to capture variations in institutional settings. The data were also sufficiently rich, consisting of four in-depth interviews, twelve classroom observations, and detailed field notes, enabling a comprehensive exploration of teachers' instructional ability.

Table 1. Participant and School Context Characteristics

Characteristics	T1	T2	T3	T4
Educational background	Bachelor's in Elementary School Teacher Education (PGSD)	Bachelor's in Elementary School Teacher Education (PGSD)	Bachelor's in English Education	Bachelor's in English Education
Years of teaching English at the primary level	4 years	2 years	5 years	3 years
Grade level(s) taught	Grade 4	Grade 1-6	Grade 1-6	Grade 1-6
Employment status	Government contract	Honorary teacher	Government contract	Government contract

	teacher		teacher	teacher
Status of English at the school	Local Content	Local content	Compulsory subject	Local content
English instructional hours per week	2 hours per week	2 hours per week	2 hours per week	2 hours per week
Audio-visual equipment available in the classroom	Speaker and projector	Speaker	Not available	projector
Textbook availability	Available for all students	Teacher's copy only	Available for all students	Available for all students

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Two instruments were used: an interview guide and a classroom observation checklist.

The interview guide consists comprised five open-ended questions, with follow-up probes, addressing teachers' experiences in planning and delivering lessons, selecting teaching methods, managing classroom activities, using learning resources, and responding to instructional challenges. Each teacher was interviewed once, for approximately 45–60 minutes, at their own school outside teaching hours. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, with English pedagogical terminology used where participants introduced it, so that teachers could articulate their reasoning without the constraint of speaking in a second language. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Extracts presented in the Findings were translated into English by the first author and back-translated by a bilingual colleague to check that the pedagogical meaning had been preserved; participants confirmed the accuracy of the translated extracts attributed to them.

The observation checklist focused on five aspects of teachers' instructional ability in teaching English at the elementary school level: lesson planning implementation, classroom management, teaching methods and strategies, the use of instructional media and learning resources, and classroom interaction. The checklist was adapted from the observation instrument developed by (Imran et al., 2024) in their study "Teachers' Perspectives in Effective English Language teaching Practices at the Elementary Level: A Phenomenological Study", Published in Heliyon. It was also aligned with the domains explored in the semi-structured interview guide to facilitate triangulation between interview and observation data. During classroom observations, each indicator was recorded as present or absent and accompanied by descriptive field notes, which served as the primary source of observational data by providing contextual evidence of teachers' instructional

practices and the factors that supported or hindered their instructional ability. Combining interviews with observations enabled the study to compare what teachers said about their instructional practice with what was observable in their classrooms, providing methodological triangulation of the account of instructional ability.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using the six-phase reflexive thematic analysis procedure described by (Braun et al., 2006). Analysis began with familiarization, in which the first author repeatedly read the interview transcripts and observation field notes and recorded initial analytic impressions. Initial codes were then generated by identifying meaningful units relating to teachers' enactment of English instruction; codes were applied to interview and observation data separately so that the two sources could subsequently be compared rather than conflated. Related codes were collated into candidate themes, which were reviewed against both the coded extracts and the full dataset, refined where boundaries proved unclear, and finally defined and named in relation to the research questions. Interview and observation findings were then compared and integrated through triangulation.

NVivo was used solely as a data-management environment — for storing transcripts and field notes, attaching codes to extracts, retrieving coded material, and maintaining an audit trail of coding decisions. All analytic judgements, including the generation of codes, the construction and naming of themes, and decisions about which extracts illustrate which theme, were made by the researchers. The software performed no automated coding or interpretation; the word frequency outputs it

produced (Figures 2 and 3) were treated as descriptive summaries of the corpus and are discussed with that limitation in mind.

3. Result

This section presents the findings generated through thematic analysis of the interview and observation data. It is organized in two parts, corresponding to the two research questions. The first describes how teachers' instructional ability was manifested in lesson planning, classroom management, teaching methods, and the use of instructional media. The second describes the contextual factors that supported or hindered that ability. Throughout this section the account is kept descriptive; the theoretical interpretation of these patterns is developed in the Discussion.

Manifestation of Teachers' Instructional Ability

Responsive Lesson Planning

In interview, teachers described lesson planning primarily as a process of calibrating instruction to students' learning needs and English proficiency, rather

than as the preparation of written lesson plans. They emphasized that content and activity should be adjusted to students' developmental level, and that the selection of engaging activities forms part of preparation.

Extract 1

"Even if a teacher has good speaking and pronunciation, the lesson should not be forced if students do not understand the material. It has to match their level." (T4)

T4's formulation locates the starting point of planning in the learners rather than in the teacher's own linguistic capability — a distinction that recurs below in relation to teachers' educational backgrounds. The extract expresses statement of principle rather than a description of planning stage and is presented as stated. The empirical evidence below shows whether this principle was applied in practice.

The observation data were consistent with these accounts. Across the twelve observed lessons, teachers modified explanations, task demands, and activity sequences during instruction in response to students' visible uptake, and organized activities so that participation was distributed across the class.

Classroom Management

Teachers identified classroom management as central to teaching English to young learners, and framed it as the adaptation of instructional strategy to learners' developmental characteristics rather than as the maintenance of order.

Extract 2

"When teaching upper-grade students, they can usually be reminded if they become distracted. However, lower-grade students tend to talk to one another and become busy with their own activities, so classroom management has to be really good." (T4)

Extract 3

"Some students are ready to participate, but others are not prepared and prefer to joke with their friends. During games, some students become too focused on winning, which sometimes leads to arguments, even though the purpose of the game is simply to make learning enjoyable." (T2)

Taken together, extracts 2 and 3 identify two distinct management demands: differentiating strategy by learner age, and containing the motivational side-effects of the interactive activities that the teachers themselves had chosen. The second is notable in that the management problem is generated by the pedagogy rather than external to it.

In the observed lessons, teachers opened with an established routine, issued instructions before activities began, and circulated during tasks. During games and group work they monitored participation and intervened to redirect it. These are the observable indicators on which the description above rests; no comparative judgement of management quality across the four teachers is made here, since the

study did not employ criteria that would license such a judgement.

Interactive Teaching Methods

For the purposes of this analysis, *teaching methods* refers to the way learning activity and classroom interaction are organized — games, songs, questioning sequences, pair and group work, and the language in which instruction is conducted. *Instructional media*, treated in the following subtheme, refers to the artefacts through which content is represented: textbooks, flashcards, pictures, projected material, and digital platforms. The two are closely coupled in practice, since particular methods presuppose particular media, but they were coded separately because the constraints operating on them differ: method selection was constrained largely by learner characteristics, whereas media selection was constrained additionally by what each school possessed.

Teachers regarded meaningful English use and interactive activity as fundamental to engagement. They described English as something to be used in everyday classroom interaction rather than only studied as a subject.

Extract 4

"An effective English teacher is someone who uses English in daily classroom activities. Vocabulary should be introduced through pictures and directly in English without first translating it into Indonesian." (T1)

T1 articulates a principle of direct meaning-making that deliberately withholds translation — a demanding choice in a setting where the teacher must sustain comprehension without recourse to the shared first language.

Extract 5

"An effective teacher is someone who can make students who are not interested in English become interested and capable." (T3)

T3's criterion of effectiveness is attitudinal change rather than measured attainment, which is consistent with the priority the teachers gave to participation in their activity design. Extracts 4 and 5 reflect teachers' views about what effective teaching should involve. They are therefore presented as evidence of teachers' pedagogical reasoning, rather than as evidence of what they actually did in the classroom.

Observation corroborated these accounts in part. All four teachers used games, songs, questioning strategies, and pair or group work, and delivered routine classroom instructions in simple English. Students participated actively in these activities, responded to teacher questioning, and interacted with peers during tasks.

Purposeful Use of Instructional Media

Teachers viewed instructional media in two ways: as tools that support specific teaching purposes and as resources necessary for carrying out certain classroom activities.

Extract 6

“The textbook is one of the important learning resources because it contains the materials that students need to learn.” (T2)

Extract 7

“Picture storybooks are also useful because students enjoy reading while learning new vocabulary.” (T4)

Extracts 6 and 7 show print media serving two different functions: the textbook as a structuring device for the sequence of instruction, and the storybook as a vehicle for incidental vocabulary encounter. Conventional resources thus remained central despite the availability of digital alternatives.

Extract 8

“We need speakers, projectors, microphones, and flashcards for activities such as ice-breakers and guessing games so that students do not get bored.” (T3)

Extract 9

“Projectors, speakers, and flashcards are needed for activities such as picture-and-picture.” (T1)

Extracts 8 and 9 are stated as conditional requirements: particular activity formats are described as depending on particular equipment. Media availability therefore did not merely enhance the teachers’ preferred methods but determined which of them could be attempted at all.

During the lesson, the teacher did not have access to a projector and substituted flashcards as an alternative instructional medium. The flashcards were used to support the planned classroom activity, allowing the teacher to continue the lesson despite the unavailable equipment.

In the observed lessons, textbooks, flashcards, and pictures were in use in every classroom. Projectors and audio equipment were used only in classrooms where they were installed; where they were not, teachers substituted printed and hand-made materials for the same instructional purpose. Visual media were most frequently used to introduce vocabulary and to support explanation, while textbooks remained the principal reference for classroom activity.

Summary of Teaching Ability Manifestations

Across the dataset, teachers’ instructional ability was manifested through four practices: lesson planning calibrated to students’ level and revised during instruction; classroom management differentiated by learner age and oriented to sustaining participation; teaching methods organized around interaction and meaningful English use; and media selected against a pedagogical purpose within the limits of what each school provided. Among the four practices, the use of digital media appeared to depend more on the equipment available at each school than on individual teacher choices. Because each teacher worked at a different school, the influence of the teacher and the school cannot be clearly separated. The finding is therefore presented as a pattern in the data rather than as evidence of causation.

The NVivo node structure used in the analysis is shown in Figure 1.

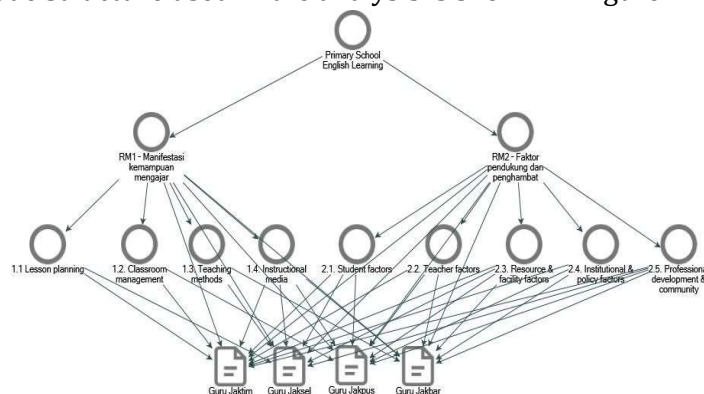


Figure 1. NVivo node hierarchy of teaching abilities and supporting or hindering factors

Figure 2 presents a word frequency visualization of the corpus relating to the first research question, in which *speaker*, *activity*, *flashcard*, *projector*, *picture*, *student*, and *management* appear most frequently.



Figure 2. Word cloud: A manifestation of teaching ability.

Figure 2 is presented as a descriptive summary of the corpus and is not treated as evidence of thematic importance. Word frequency records how often a form occurs, not how analytically significant it is, and the distribution seen here is shaped by at least three artefacts of the data-generation process. First, the interview guide and the observation checklist both contained items explicitly about learning facilities and resources, so equipment nouns were prompted by the instruments themselves. Second, concrete equipment nouns are lexically fixed — a projector can only be called a projector — whereas the pedagogical reasoning that carries most of the analytic weight in this study is expressed in variable phrasing that word frequency disperses across many low-count forms. Third, teachers named equipment in lists (Extracts 9 and 10), which inflates counts relative to ideas expressed once at length. The prominence of *speaker*, *projector*, and *flashcard* should therefore be read as an indication of how the questions were framed and of the lexical properties of the vocabulary involved, rather than as evidence that

equipment is the principal component of teachers' instructional ability. The themes reported above were derived from coded extracts and observational field notes, not from frequency counts.

Factors Influencing Teachers' Instructional Ability

Factors Supporting of Teachers' Instructional Ability

Teachers described a range of activities through which they worked on their own teaching: training programmers and webinars, membership of teacher professional communities, exchange with colleagues, and self-directed study using online resources.

Extract 10

"I participate in training programs and webinars, study independently, and join an English teacher community in Jakarta called KK GEBING (Kelompok Kerja Guru Bahasa Inggris)." (T1)

Extract 11

"I have never attended a training program specifically for English teaching, so I usually learn independently by searching for information on the internet. I am afraid of missing new teaching approaches because students become bored if the lessons are monotonous." (T2)

Extract 12

"There are teacher communities at the district, city, and provincial levels that regularly organize training programs. We also have annual meetings to share experiences and evaluate English teaching." (T4)

Extract 13

"...sharing teaching methods and instructional media, including more up-to-date media such as Quizizz." (T3)

Extracts 11–13 describe two different routes to the same end. T1 and T4 had access to organized provision — a named subject community and a tiered structure of district, city, and provincial training. T3's account indicates that such collegial exchange extended to the sourcing of specific platforms and activity formats. T2 had none, and substituted self-directed search. The three accounts thus record not a uniform commitment to development but an uneven distribution of access, met by individual effort where provision was absent. Notably, T2's stated motivation was not compliance or credentialing but the risk of her lessons becoming monotonous, which locates the impetus for her learning in classroom consequences.

Supporting factor: student engagement

Teachers treated students' active participation as something that enabled more ambitious instructional choices, in that responsive classes permitted games, group tasks, and extended English use, whereas subdued classes required the teacher to carry more of the interaction. Observation recorded active student

participation in interactive activities across the four classrooms, with students responding to teacher questioning and interacting with peers during tasks.

Extract 14

"The biggest challenge is explaining the material so that students can understand it because every child has different abilities. Some understand quickly, while others need repeated explanations." (T1)

Extract 15

"Lower-grade students are more difficult to manage because they are still very active and easily lose focus. Sometimes, when games are used, students become too competitive and conflicts occur." (T3)

The difficulty described in Extracts 14 and 15 is one of simultaneity: the teacher must serve divergent comprehension rates within a single lesson period, and must do so through activity formats that themselves generate management demands. Observation confirmed variation in participation within and between classes.

Hindering factor: uneven material provision

Extract 16

"Ideally, every student should have an English textbook because not all students have adequate mobile phones. However, the school has not yet distributed enough textbooks to all classes. Therefore, I provide an e-book and communicate with parents so that students can still access the learning materials." (T2)

Extract 16 documents a shortfall being displaced rather than resolved: the absence of textbooks is absorbed by the teacher through additional preparation and additional communication with families, and the residual cost falls on households that must supply a device. Observation found that basic materials — textbooks, flashcards, pictures — were generally available across the four schools, but that audio-visual facilities were not present in every classroom, and that teachers adjusted their planned activities to the equipment actually installed.

Table 2 sets out the supporting and hindering factors by level.

Table 2. Matrix of factors shaping teachers' instructional ability

Level	Supporting factors	Hindering factors	Principal evidence	
Teacher	Participation in training, webinars, and subject-teacher communities; self-directed study; willingness to adapt strategy mid-lesson	Non-English educational background; unequal access to formal English-specific training	E11, E13, observation of in-lesson adaptation	E12, E14;

Student	Active participation and responsiveness, enabling more ambitious activity design	Heterogeneous comprehension rates; limited confidence in producing English; over-	E4, E6, E14, E15, E16; observation of participation patterns
School / institutional	Availability of textbooks and basic visual media; existence of collegial structures for sharing practice	Insufficient textbook distribution; audio-visual equipment not installed in all classrooms	E9, E10, E17; observation of media use by classroom



Figure 3. Word cloud of factors that support and hinder teaching ability

As with Figure 2, this visualization is offered as a descriptive overview of the corpus rather than as analytic evidence, and is subject to the same qualifications regarding the influence of instrument wording on lexical frequency.

Summary of the second research question

The factors identified operate at three levels and interact rather than acting independently. Teachers' professional learning was pursued through formal channels where available and through self-directed study where not; students' engagement functioned as an instructional resource while their heterogeneous readiness and reticence in producing English constrained activity design; and school provision determined which media-dependent methods were available to each teacher. The teachers' response in every case of shortfall was compensatory — substituting print for projection, e-books for textbooks, personal search for institutional training — which sustained instruction but transferred the cost of the shortfall onto the teacher.

4. Discussion

This section interprets the findings in relation to the literature on English for

Young Learners and on teacher knowledge, considers what the urban setting contributes to the account, and sets out the boundaries within which the claims hold.

Instructional Ability as the Integrated Enactment of Teaching Practices

The central finding is that the four practices reported above did not operate as separate competencies but as a single coordinated response to classroom conditions. Planning was revised during instruction on the basis of what management of the class revealed about comprehension; method selection was constrained by the media at hand; and management demands were generated by the interactive methods the teachers had chosen. Instructional ability, on this evidence, is better described as the coordination of these practices under real-time constraint than as their sum.

This reading is compatible with (Shulman, 1987) account of pedagogical content knowledge, in which effective teaching depends on the transformation of subject-matter knowledge into forms that learners can access, and with (Richards, 2017) argument that language teaching competence resides in informed instructional decision-making rather than in language proficiency alone. The teachers in this study adapted content to learner readiness, selected developmentally appropriate methods, and used media to make meaning available all recognizable as acts of pedagogical transformation.

Where the present findings press beyond these accounts is in the temporality of the transformation. PCK is usually described as a knowledge base that teachers hold and draw upon; what was observable here was a continuous process of adjustment in which the transformation was performed, revised, and performed again within a single lesson in response to feedback from learners. The distinction matters practically: a knowledge-based conception implies that instructional ability is improved by supplying teachers with more knowledge, whereas an enactment conception implies that it is improved by increasing teachers' opportunities to read and respond to classroom feedback — through observation, coaching, and structured reflection on their own lessons.

Critical Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings both align with and complicate the existing Indonesian literature. (Albustomi et al., 2024) reported that elementary teachers in East Lombok were inadequately prepared to teach EYL, attributing this to limited training and weak school support. The teachers in the present study, working in a metropolitan setting, enacted the four practices described above consistently across the observed lessons. Read together, these two studies do not straightforwardly contradict one another; rather, their juxtaposition suggests that what is often reported as teacher preparedness may be substantially a function of the density of professional infrastructure surrounding the teacher. T1's membership of a named Jakarta subject-teacher community and T4's access to a tiered district-city–

provincial training structure are conditions of location as much as of individual initiative, and they are not available in the same form in East Lombok. This comparison should be understood as a contextual contrast rather than a direct replication. The two studies used different instruments and examined different aspects, so the comparison is presented as an interpretation rather than a direct empirical comparison. The implication is that “teacher preparedness” findings are difficult to interpret without a corresponding account of the professional ecology in which the teacher works.

These findings also resonate with two Indonesian studies that highlighted limitations in teacher support and professional development. (Rohqim, 2020) found that primary school teachers need basic, targeted training in teaching English to young learners (EYL), which may not be adequately addressed through general professional development programmers. Similarly, (Arlinda et al., 2024) reported limited access to professional development and instructional resources. The present findings add a teacher-level perspective to this issue. For example, T2 had never participated in English-specific training, but she continued to develop her teaching practice through independent and informal online searches. Thus, limited institutional support did not prevent professional learning; instead, it shifted the way learning took place, from structured and collaborative professional development to more individual and occasional forms of learning.

The comparison with (Dewi & Haryanti, 2023) is more pointed. They found a substantial gap in pedagogical competence between teachers with and without English education backgrounds. In the present study, teachers’ educational backgrounds differed, yet the enacted practices recorded in observation did not sort neatly along that line. Three explanations are worth distinguishing rather than conflating. The first is methodological: (Dewi & Haryanti, 2023) measured competence using an instrument, whereas the present study observed practice, and these are not the same construct - a teacher may score poorly on a competence measure while managing a lesson effectively, and vice versa. The second is compensatory: teachers without English-education backgrounds in this study were active users of professional communities and self-directed learning, which may have substituted for initial preparation over the two or more years of experience required for inclusion. The third is a limitation of the present design: with four participants and no measure of English proficiency, this study is not positioned to detect a competence gap of the kind (Dewi & Haryanti, 2023) report, and the absence of an observed difference should not be read as evidence that no difference exists.

Relative to (Garton & Tekin, 2020) and (Primary et al., 2023), who establish the importance of teachers’ instructional ability for EYL outcomes, the contribution here is at the level of specification rather than confirmation. Those studies establish that instructional ability matters; the present study describes the four practices through which it becomes visible in classroom activity and identifies the

point at which each of them is vulnerable to contextual constraint.

What the Study Contributes Beyond PCK and Teacher Cognition

(Borg, 2006) teacher cognition framework holds that classroom practice is shaped by the interaction of prior learning experience, professional knowledge, contextual conditions, and classroom realities. The present findings are consistent with that architecture and add two specifications to it.

First, the contextual conditions in this dataset did not act diffusely on practice; they acted through a specific and identifiable mechanism, namely the availability of media. Extracts 9 and 10 record teachers stating that particular activity formats require particular equipment. Where the equipment was absent, the format was not attempted. Context therefore entered instruction not as a general influence on teacher belief but as a constraint on the set of methods available for selection on a given day in a given room.

Second, student engagement functioned in these data as an input to instructional decision-making and not only as its outcome. Teachers reported and were observed to expand or contract the ambition of their activity design according to how a class was responding. Teacher cognition models typically position learners as the object of the teacher's decisions; these findings suggest that learner responsiveness is more accurately treated as one of the resources on which the decision draws.

The Urban Context and Its Specific Conditions

Urban schooling is often treated as the well-resourced default against which rural disadvantage is measured. The present findings support a more differentiated view. Five features of the urban setting shaped instruction in these four schools, and they did not all operate in the same direction.

Class size. Large metropolitan class sizes intensify the heterogeneity problem described in Extracts 14 and 15: the greater the number of learners, the wider the spread of comprehension rates the teacher must serve in one period, and the higher the management load generated by group and game-based methods. The management demands the teachers described are therefore not simply a property of young learners but of young learners in numbers.

Digital access. Digital media were used unevenly, and the unevenness lay between schools rather than between teachers. T3's reference to Quizizz (Extract 2) indicates familiarity with platform-based activity; whether such activity was feasible depended on installed equipment and connectivity. Urban location secured connectivity but not classroom-level provision, and the two should not be conflated in policy terms.

Institutional resources. The textbook shortfall in Extract 16 occurred in a Jakarta public school. Urban location did not guarantee adequate provision of even the most basic instructional resource, and the shortfall was absorbed by the teacher's own labour and by household expenditure on devices.

Parental expectations. T2's account of coordinating with parents so that students could access e-book materials indicates a level of household involvement — and household device ownership — that instruction was able to rely upon. In metropolitan Jakarta, parental demand for English is generally high and this can function as a support for the subject's standing in the school timetable; it may equally exert pressure toward visible, examinable outcomes that sit awkwardly with the participation-oriented pedagogy these teachers described. This study did not gather parent data and cannot adjudicate between the two effects; it is noted as a feature of the setting requiring investigation.

Teacher networks. The most consequential urban feature in these data is the density of professional networks. The subject-teacher community named in Extract 11 and the tiered training structure described in Extract 13 are metropolitan infrastructures. They provided the teachers with a route to instructional knowledge that did not depend on their initial qualification, and it is plausible that this, more

than any other single condition, accounts for the competence observed in teachers whose formal preparation was not in English education.

Would Instructional Ability Look Different Elsewhere?

The findings should not be extended to rural or under-resourced schools, and there are specific reasons to expect the pattern to differ there. The compensations that sustained instruction in this study each presuppose an urban resource: substituting an e-book for a textbook presupposes household devices and connectivity; joining a subject-teacher community presupposes that one exists within reach; self-directed study through online resources presupposes reliable internet. In settings where these presuppositions fail, a shortfall in provision would not be absorbable by teacher effort in the same way, and instructional ability might well appear as the more constrained construct that (Albustomi et al., 2024) describe. Comparative work across urban and rural sites is needed to test this, and until it is available, the account offered here should be read as an account of instructional ability under relatively favourable infrastructural conditions.

Educational Background, English Proficiency, and Enacted Practice

A tension runs through these findings. Teachers whose initial preparation was not in English education nonetheless enacted practices — teaching through English without translation, sustaining interaction in the target language, introducing vocabulary through visual mediation — that make substantial demands on the teacher's own English. Two readings are possible. The first is that instructional ability is genuinely separable from formal qualification and is built through experience, professional community participation, and reflection, in which case the policy implication favours investment in in-service structures over credential requirements. The second is that the teachers' English proficiency was

in fact adequate to these demands regardless of their formal field of study, in which case the apparent tension dissolves.

The present study cannot distinguish between these readings, because it did not assess participants' English proficiency. This is a substantive limitation rather than an incidental one: instructional ability in a language subject is partly constituted by the teacher's command of the language being taught, and a study that observes the enactment of that ability without measuring proficiency leaves an important term of the account unspecified. makes the related point that language proficiency and teaching competence are distinct but not independent a teacher's proficiency sets limits on the range of instructional moves available, particularly those requiring extended target-language interaction or unscripted response to learner production. Extract 5, in which T1 describes withholding translation entirely, describes precisely such a proficiency-dependent move. Future work in this area should pair observation of enacted practice with a proficiency measure, so that the relationship between the two can be examined rather than assumed.

Proposed Model of Instructional Ability

The four elements included in this model—teacher knowledge, professional learning, student engagement, and school resources—were identified in the conceptual framework presented in the Introduction. Therefore, the model is not presented as something that emerged entirely from the data. Instead, the findings add two important features to the model. The first is the mediating role of teachers' decision-making, suggesting that the available resources and professional learning do not directly translate into classroom practice. How teachers interpret and use these inputs also matters. The second is the feedback loop, which highlights the developmental nature of instructional ability. Teachers' ability can develop over time as they learn from classroom experiences and adjust their practices based on the outcomes they observe. The model is therefore proposed as a hypothesis based on this four-teacher case study rather than as a validated framework. Further research involving larger and more diverse samples, preferably with longitudinal data, would be needed to examine and develop the model further.

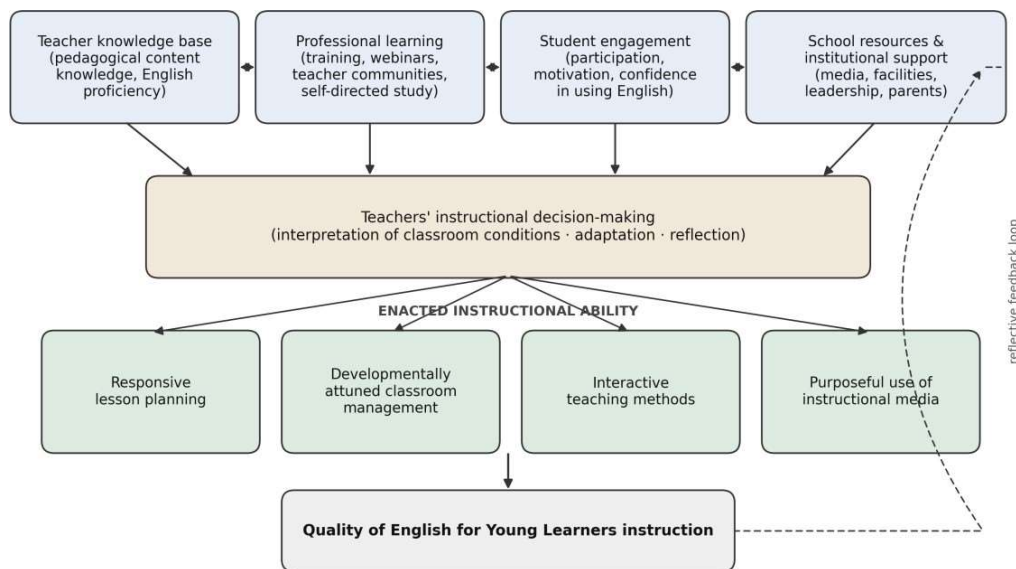


Figure 4. Proposed conceptual model of the constitution of instructional ability in elementary EYL teaching.

Two features of the model carry the analytic weight. The first is the mediating layer: no input reaches practice unmediated, which is why supplying resources or training without attending to teachers' decision-making capacity produces limited change. The second is the feedback loop, which makes the model developmental — instructional ability as an accumulating capacity built from classroom consequences, rather than a fixed attribute. The model is offered as a hypothesis generated from a four-teacher case study, not as a validated framework; testing it would require larger and more varied samples and, ideally, longitudinal data.

Limitations

Several limitations bound the claims made here. The study involved four teachers in one metropolitan area, and its findings are therefore an account of instructional ability under particular and comparatively favourable conditions rather than a description of Indonesian elementary English teachers as a whole. No claim of statistical or population generalizability is made; what the study offers is analytic transferability, and readers should judge the applicability of the account to other settings against the contextual detail provided in Table 1 and in the discussion of urban conditions above.

Participation required willingness to be observed, which may have selected for teachers who were relatively confident in their practice; teachers experiencing greater difficulty may be systematically underrepresented. The presence of an observer may itself have shifted practice toward the more elaborate and interactive end of each teacher's repertoire. Each teacher was interviewed once, so the account of their reasoning is a single-point record rather than one developed over time. The study did not include post-observation or stimulated-recall interviews. Therefore,

although classroom observations captured teachers' instructional decisions, the study could not explore the teachers' reasoning behind those decisions at the time they occurred. In addition, all classroom observations were conducted by the first author, which prevented the establishment of inter-observer reliability. The observation checklist also used presence-or-absence indicators, limiting its ability to capture differences in the extent or quality of teachers' instructional practices. The study did not include post-observation or stimulated-recall interviews, which limits the depth of insight into teachers' decision-making. Although the observations captured what teachers did in the classroom, they did not provide direct access to the reasons behind particular instructional decisions at the time they were made. In addition, all observations were conducted by the first author, so inter-observer reliability could not be established. The observation checklist also recorded each indicator only as present or absent, making it difficult to capture differences in the frequency or degree of particular practices.

The study did not assess participants' English proficiency, for the reasons discussed above, and did not collect student learning outcomes, so the relationship between the practices described and students' English development is untested. Because each teacher taught at a different school, teacher-level and school-level influences are confounded and cannot be disentangled within this design. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and extracts translated for presentation, and although translation was checked, some nuance is inevitably lost. Finally, the analysis was led by a single primary coder, and although intercoder checking, member checking, and peer debriefing were employed, the interpretation remains a reflexive product of the research team rather than a neutral reading of the data.

Implications

For practice, the findings indicate that strengthening instructional ability requires attention to the mediating layer of the model rather than to inputs alone. Professional development that is subject-specific, recurrent, collegial, and grounded in teachers' own classrooms — the form accessed by T1 and T4 — is materially different from the individual, episodic search that T2 was left to rely on, and provision should be designed and evaluated with that distinction in view. Schools should also recognize that the compensations teachers make for material shortfalls, while effective, transfer cost to the teacher and to households, and are not a substitute for adequate provision.

For policy and teacher preparation, the finding that teachers without English-education backgrounds enacted competent practice where professional infrastructure was available suggests that investment in sustained, classroom-embedded in-service structures — subject-teacher communities in particular — may yield more than tightening credential requirements alone. This should be read as a proposition supported by four cases in a well-networked metropolitan setting, not as a general policy conclusion; in settings without such infrastructure, initial

preparation is likely to carry correspondingly more weight.

For research, three directions follow. Comparative studies across urban and rural, and public and private, schools would test whether the compensatory mechanisms identified here are contingent on urban infrastructure. Studies pairing observation of enacted practice with measures of teachers' English proficiency would resolve the question this study left open. Longitudinal or mixed-methods designs would allow the feedback loop proposed in Figure 4 to be examined directly, tracing how classroom consequences accumulate into instructional capacity over time and whether that capacity registers in students' English learning outcomes.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how elementary school teachers' instructional ability is enacted in English teaching in an urban Indonesian context, and which factors support and hinder it. Instructional ability was manifested through four interconnected practices: lesson planning calibrated to learners' level and revised during instruction, classroom management differentiated by learner age and directed at sustaining participation, teaching methods organized around interaction and meaningful English use, and instructional media selected against pedagogical purpose within the limits of school provision. These practices operated as a coordinated response to classroom conditions rather than as discrete skills, supporting a conception of instructional ability as a multidimensional construct enacted in practice rather than a property conferred by qualification.

The study further found that this ability is shaped by the interaction of teacher-related, student-related, and school-related factors. Teachers' engagement in professional learning, students' active participation, and the availability of instructional resources supported effective instruction, while unequal access to English-specific training, students' heterogeneous readiness and limited confidence in producing English, and uneven material provision constrained it. Where provision fell short, teachers compensated through their own labor — substituting print for projection, e-books for textbooks, and personal search for institutional training — which sustained instruction but relocated the cost of the shortfall onto teachers and households.

These conclusions are drawn from four teachers in four public elementary schools in a single metropolitan area and describe instructional ability under relatively favorable infrastructural conditions. The study describes what these teachers did rather than evaluating how well they did it, and the compensatory mechanisms identified may not be available in less well-networked settings. They are not offered as a characterization of Indonesian elementary English teachers generally, and the compensatory mechanisms identified may not be available in less well-networked settings. Within these bounds, the study contributes to the EYL literature a practice-based account of instructional ability, together with a conceptual model of how teacher knowledge, professional learning, student

engagement, and school resources jointly shape it — a model that invites testing across the more varied contexts in which English is taught to young learners in Indonesia.

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