

## THE EFFECT OF ENGLISH AS AN OPTIONAL SUBJECT AT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TOWARDS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH PRODUCTIVE SKILL

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### **ABSTRACT**

English is an optional subject in elementary school, but it has many drawbacks. Based on the problem, the researcher wanted to seek out the effect of English as an optional subject in elementary school on junior high school English productive skill. The researcher used a mixed method with the ex-post facto design, where quantitative data were processed before qualitative data. Questionnaires, interviews, and open-ended tests were used to gain the data. All the data analyses were counted on SPSS. The respondents were 45 students at SMPN 26 Kota Serang with criteria for 7th-grade JHS students who previously had English as an optional subject. The results showed negative and non-significant simultaneous effects between learning English as an optional subject at Elementary school towards Junior High School students' English productive skills with an f-value of 0.154 with a significance value of 0.858 (far above 0.05). The students struggled to improve their speaking and writing skills in junior high school due to the lack of active practice opportunities. This results in a lack of foundational English skills and difficulty meeting higher standards at Junior High School.

Keywords: English Productive Skills, Speaking Skill, Writing Skill

### **ABSTRAK**

*Bahasa Inggris sebagai mata pelajaran pilihan di sekolah dasar dan banyak menuai kontra. Berdasarkan permasalahan tersebut, peneliti ingin mengetahui pengaruh Bahasa Inggris sebagai mata pelajaran pilihan di sekolah dasar terhadap keterampilan produktif Bahasa Inggris di sekolah menengah pertama. Peneliti menggunakan metode campuran dengan desain ex-post facto, dimana data kuantitatif diolah terlebih dahulu sebelum data kualitatif. Angket, wawancara, dan tes terbuka digunakan untuk memperoleh data. Semua analisis data dihitung pada SPSS. Responden adalah 45 siswa di SMPN 26 Kota Serang dengan kriteria siswa kelas 7 SMP yang sebelumnya memiliki Bahasa Inggris sebagai mata pelajaran pilihan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya pengaruh simultan yang negatif dan tidak signifikan antara pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai mata pelajaran pilihan di Sekolah Dasar terhadap keterampilan produktif Bahasa Inggris siswa Sekolah Menengah Pertama dengan nilai f sebesar 0,154 dengan nilai signifikansi 0,858 (jauh di atas 0,05). Siswa mengalami kesulitan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara dan menulis di Sekolah Menengah Pertama karena kurangnya kesempatan untuk berlatih secara aktif. Hal ini mengakibatkan kurangnya keterampilan dasar Bahasa Inggris dan kesulitan untuk memenuhi standar yang lebih tinggi di Sekolah Menengah Pertama.*

*Kata kunci: Keterampilan Produktif Bahasa Inggris, Keterampilan Berbicara, Keterampilan Menulis*

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia uses the educational curriculum as a reference in carrying out academic activities. Since the beginning of Indonesian independence in 1945, Indonesia has changed its learning curriculum eight times, the latest in 2022, under the name Merdeka Curriculum. (Sulistyaningrum & Sumarni, 2023). Among many subjects, English is one of the subjects that is in the public spotlight because it has become an optional subject.

English in elementary school becomes an optional subject which is returned to the school to provide English language teaching depending on the readiness of the teaching staff and infrastructure such as the language laboratory. This change aims to help elementary school students increase their comprehension of Indonesian before studying a foreign language. Some Indonesian educators and ministers fear that English increases students' cognitive load in acquiring language, and Elementary school students are less focused on obtaining the national language (Indonesian) (Maili, 2018). They are afraid that students who learn English in elementary school are disturbed intellectually, culturally, and psychologically.

Students or children from early to ten years old are better off learning another language or a second language (Peacock, 2001). They better understand vocabulary and pronunciation and can speak the language like a foreigner. From age ten, using a second language becomes unnatural, and children struggle with reducing the dominant accent language they use at home or in interactions with others. Learning a foreign language has unanticipated benefits for students (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011). This means that learning English at the elementary school level does not interfere with student's ability to focus on acquiring Indonesian. It affects students' cognitive focus. Research has shown that knowing a foreign language improves communication skills, cognitive growth, cultural awareness, and job chances. Furthermore, when they enter college, today's children are expected to be fluent in two languages. In Indonesia itself, English is still urgent.

English urgency in Indonesia can be seen from several conditions, for English is used as one of the academic tests when a person wants to enter an educational institution, compete globally in Industry 5.0, gain information, and expand knowledge internationally. This situation requires all Indonesians to be able to understand English. However, Indonesian English proficiency has been low for the last 7 years (since 2017-2023) (EF, 2023). In 2023, Indonesia ranked no. 79 out of 113 countries with EF EPI score of 473 and its position in Asia 13 of 23. In this test, the results also showed that the English language proficiency of Indonesians aged 18-20 was lower with low proficiency compared to Indonesians aged 21-25 (EF, 2023).

On the other hand, the policy of teaching English as an optional subject, especially at the elementary school level, has reaped several cons caused by English helping students in the next level of education. Several parents, teachers, and students agree that English is taught at the Elementary level. As many as 95.61% (109 participants from parents) and 100% (14 participants from teachers) stated "yes" in a statement that English must be acquired in elementary school to encourage students' abilities while they study in junior high school (Mahaputri & Susanti, 2021). They chose it because they think that English must be learned and can help students reach the next level of education. After all, basic English is taught at the elementary level and can help students learn at the Junior High School level, especially for productive (Speaking and Writing) skills.

English productive skills can be classified into two categories: speaking and writing. Speaking and writing are the most crucial skills students must acquire to improve their personal growth and educational achievement. These skills represent students' selves because they are produced naturally from students' thoughts. It demands that learners understand how to develop linguistic competence, such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, and sociolinguistic competence, such as when, why, and how to communicate. Grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, substance, and structure are all characteristics that define effective

writing. These aspects can cause some lack of skills such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and feeling anxious (Aminah & Supriadi, 2023; Zannah et al., 2023)

Prior research in Japan examined how studying English in elementary school affected students' English learning in junior high school. The study revealed that English Foreign Language Elementary School (EFLES) helped students build their future English skills in vocabulary, grammar, reading, listening, and speaking (Uematsu, 2012). Unfortunately, this study did not show clearly in each English skill how English students develop in Junior High School based on learning English in elementary school. Indonesia also conducted prior research on how English learning in elementary school influences students' English Language Development in junior high school. It assessed vocabulary, grammar, and reading ability. In 2017/2018, they were utilized to survey seventh-grade students at SMP Muhammadiyah Sumbang (Mutiarasari, 2018). Where the research did not research productive skills.

Referring to several previous studies that have been discussed previously, the researcher finds some gaps. First, they did not explain briefly which factor had a significant or lesser effect on each skill. Second, they did not give scores based on the curriculum. On the other hand, the researcher conducted the research that focuses on discussing the effect of English as an optional subject at elementary school on Junior High School students' productive English (writing and speaking) skills based on vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, and comprehension scoring in *Merdeka Kurikulum* (Independent Curriculum).

## METHODOLOGY

Research is carried out to ascertain whether the phenomenon or thing being researched can be used as new knowledge and become a problem solver, which presents answers and research conclusions that are formal, open, grounded, and valid. Some of the primary pillars of any research activity are the research objective,

research process (method), and research results (product) (Schwab-mccoy, 2019). In this study, the researcher used a mixed-method research design to examine the effect of English as an optional subject in elementary school on English productive skills in Junior High School.

Mixed methods research combines quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methodologies in a single study, allowing researchers to understand complex issues better and deliver better insights. This integration occurs at several stages of the research process, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting (Creswell, 2018). In this research, the researcher uses ex post facto design.

Ex post facto refers to an empirical and systematic study process in which the researchers do not control independent variables directly because these variables have already occurred or because these variables basically cannot be manipulated. Conclusions about a relationship between these variables are made based on the differences accompanying the independent variables and related variables without direct intervention. It was selected because English as an optional subject at Elementary school has been passed by students who are the research participants for the researcher.

The researcher conducted research at SMPN 26 Kota Serang, which uses an independent curriculum as the basis for learning. The number of participants was 45, with criteria for 7th-grade JHS students who previously had English as an optional subject.

To gain qualitative and quantitative data, the researcher uses research instruments. It is the tool used to measure observed natural or social phenomena to test the validity and reliability of the data collected (Sugiyono, 2023). The researcher used a questionnaire, interview, open-ended test, recording, and documentation to determine the effect of English as an optional subject in Elementary school on English productive skills in Junior High School students.

Next, data collection is an important step in research since it reduces potential mistakes and improves the quality of results (Taherdoost, 2021). Before determining a data collection method, consider which data type is needed for the research. This paper aims to offer an overview of accessible data types and guide through the various data-gathering methods that depend on the categories. The data collection methods used in this research are questionnaires, interviews, and open-ended tests. Recording and documentation are used in each data collection as the researcher archives the data.

First, a questionnaire is a data collection technique that gives participants written or unwritten questions to be answered with closed or open questions (Sugiyono, 2023). Open questions have an answer in the form of a description, while closed questions have several answers determined, and participants only choose one answer according to their opinion.

In this research, the researcher wants to know students' opinions, difficulties, and the effects of learning English as an optional subject; therefore, the researcher use a closed questionnaire. There are 10 questions on the questionnaire. Each question has five conditions that can be chosen based on respondents' opinions,

Second, interviews are used to find preliminary studies related to problems that are tested with participants in depth with notes on questions asked according to the participant's condition. Interviews are conducted in a structured and unstructured manner and can also be conducted face-to-face or using the telephone. (Sugiyono, 2023). In this research, the researcher used unstructured interviews because the researcher wanted to know the more profound students' opinions through difficulties and effects faced by English as an optional subject. It was done face-to-face with participants. On the other hand, this interview is also a tool for gaining students' ability to speak and clarify participants' opinions through a questionnaire.

Last, Open-ended questions encourage students to provide their responses vocally or in writing. Researchers can utilize open questions to study respondents' responses word for word, gaining deeper insights into the substance and how they understand the questions asked for their answers (Singer & Couper, 2017). In the researcher's research, an open-ended test means the participants write a descriptive text with a theme, a person, and an animal in a picture selected by the researcher.

The researcher chose descriptive text to refer to the achievements of the elements of listening—speaking, and writing—presenting for grade 5 elementary school specified in the Merdeka Curriculum; students should be able to describe people or objects around the house and school using simple present tense according to context, punctuation marks, capital letters, and appropriate spelling. This open-ended text lets the researcher know the participants' writing ability, grammar, and vocabulary.

The research collected data from a Junior High School grade 7 at SMPN 26 Kota Serang using a mixed methods explanatory sequential design. Quantitative data was processed first, followed by qualitative data. The data was combined through simultaneous integration, identifying similar and different findings, creating display tables, comparing themes, and confirming or expanding results. The quantitative data aimed to determine if English as an optional subject affects the English productive skills of Junior High School students, while the qualitative data explored the reasons behind the quantitative results. The researcher uses three variables: X1 as speaking skill, X2 as writing skill, and Y as Junior high school students. All data analyses were conducted using SPSS.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

After collecting data from 45 students in Junior High School grade 7 at SMPN 26 Kota Serang using a mixed methods explanatory sequential design, the researcher processed the data using SPSS. The F test is a test used to find whether there is a relationship between two independent variables ( $x_1$  &  $x_2$ ) simultaneously

towards one dependent variable ( $y_1$ ) and t-test for a statistical hypothesis test that compares the means of two groups to determine if there is a significant difference between them.

Table 1. t-Test Result

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
		B				
1	(Constant)	10.614	1.476	-	7.193	.000
	X1	-.096	.182	.097	-.529	.600
	X2	.069	.162	.078	.425	.673

1. X1 to Y (Speaking skill through students)

The t-value = -0.529 and Sig. = 0.600 (greater than 0.05) indicates that variable X1 is not statistically significant. This means that X1 does not significantly affect the dependent variable Y. It means there are negative and not significant effects between learning English as an optional subject at Elementary school towards Junior High School students' English speaking skills.

2. X2 to Y (Writing skill through students)

The t-value = 0.425 and Sig. = 0.673 (greater than 0.05), indicating that the variable X2 is also not statistically significant. It means there are negative and not significant effects between learning English as an optional subject in Elementary school towards Junior High School students' English writing skills.

The t-test result shows that variables X1 and X2 do not significantly influence dependent Y because their significance values (Sig.) are more significant than 0.05.

Table 2. F-test Result

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.056	2	.528	.154	.858 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	42	3.433			
	Total	44				

The result shows an  $F$  value of 0.154 and a significance value of 0.858, indicating that the regression model built using predictors  $X_1$  and  $X_2$  is not significant in explaining the variability of the dependent variable  $Y$ . With a significance value far above 0.05, it fails to reject the null hypothesis, which means that there is no significant relationship between the independent variables  $X_1$  and  $X_2$  and the dependent variable  $Y$ .

In Indonesia, mastering English is optional at the elementary school level and becomes mandatory in junior high school. This situation leads to several cons. Several parents, students, and teachers agree that English should be taught at elementary schools to support students' English abilities in junior high school. According to this situation, the researcher discovers the effect of English as an optional subject at Elementary School on English productive skills in Junior High School students.

Based on the research results, the researcher found no significant relationship between English as an optional subject at Elementary School and English productive skills in Junior High School students in grade 7 of SMPN 24 Kota Serang.

### **Learning English as an Optional Subject in Elementary School towards Junior High School Students' English Speaking Skills**

In the interview sessions, the researcher instructed the students to introduce themselves and give them one picture they had to describe orally. The researcher found that there were negative and no significant effects between learning English as an optional subject in Elementary school and Junior High School students' English speaking skills From the research using statistical tests SPSS. The resulting regression coefficient is negative, meaning that the longer students are exposed to English as an optional subject in Elementary School, their English speaking skills in Junior High School tend not to improve, even decreasing indirectly significantly. However, this effect is insignificant, which means this result may not be strong enough to generalize.

This is evident from the interview results, where no students could introduce themselves completely using English. They could only answer basic questions such as "What is your name?" and "Where is your school?" Furthermore, the researcher tried to help students by giving basic questions about self-introduction; only 17 students understood the question but could not answer it in English. Other evidence can be seen from the results of the oral description, which showed that not all students could explain the specified picture. There were only 11 students who knew that in the picture there was a boy and a cat when asked the researcher, "Is this a boy or a girl?" and "What is it?" Those who could answer had the wrong pronunciation, where they mentioned using Indonesian pronunciation. Almost all students called it /caat/, which should be /kæt/. This is reinforced by the opinion of 45 students, 26 of whom stated that English is difficult to pronounce. This is related to pronunciation.

From the interview results, it can be concluded that the difficulty pronouncing English is one of the negative factors that makes English an optional subject in elementary school. Lack of practice in speaking English makes students unable to speak English well. In addition, the researcher also obtained opinions from six students who stated that English is difficult because they do not learn it. Furthermore, the researcher also obtained other opinions stating that English is difficult because they are not confident, do not memorize vocabulary, and are not used to it.

The data confirms the results of a study conducted by Candraloka & Rosdiana (2019), Students with a poor understanding of speaking abilities, such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency, have difficulty speaking English. On the other hand, personal factors such as shyness, nervousness, confusion, lack of confidence, and fear of making errors contribute to these problems. The survey discovered that students speaking abilities were rated as a failure, with vocabulary and grammar being the most difficult. A lack of practice caused these difficulties,

and the school environment did not support students in acquiring and practicing English speaking.

### **Learning English as an Optional Subject in Elementary School towards Junior High School Students' English Writing Skills**

The researcher used a picture that should be described using English in a minimum of 10 sentences in writing skills. The result was also not statistically significant. It means there were adverse and insignificant effects between learning English as an optional subject in Elementary school towards Junior High School students' English writing. In addition, the result of the open-ended test showed that students could only describe a picture in one word or one sentence, whereas students should describe it in ten sentences. Many students have incorrect vocabulary, miss grammar, and lack mechanical writing. This can be seen from the writing assessment results, which showed an average score of 1 for each aspect of writing (Grammar, accuracy, and mechanics writing). Students who get English lessons optionally in elementary school have difficulty writing English because they do not know English vocabulary.

The same result was found in research conducted by Nuralisaputri & Megawati (2023). Students struggled with language, grammar, and organization in their writing, resulting in erroneous sentences and grammatical errors. They also struggled to arrange descriptive text and organize ideas based on generic structure, making significant punctuation, spelling, and capitalization mistakes. These issues hindered their ability to convey intended ideas effectively.

### **Learning English as an Optional Subject at Elementary School towards Junior High School Students' English Productive Skills**

There were negative and non-significant simultaneous effects between learning English as an optional subject at Elementary school towards Junior High School students' English productive skills. The negative effects of these results indicate that students who learn English as an optional subject in elementary school tend not to have better speaking and writing skills in junior high school. In

interviews, students revealed that they did not have the opportunity to practice speaking or writing English actively because they did not learn it in elementary school. As a result, when they enter junior high school, they lack a foundation in productive skills and find it difficult to catch up to the higher standards at the junior high school level. This means that students must have more time to practice and learn English. This is supported by research conducted by Uematsu, 2012, who found that students who received more hours of English as a Foreign Language at elementary schools (EFLES) showed improved English skills in vocabulary, grammar, reading, and listening by junior high school. Specifically, students with 90 hours of EFLES since grade 4 demonstrated higher test scores in these areas, although the improvements were not always statistically significant.

In the interview, students mentioned several other factors to help them understand productive skills, including increasing writing, speaking, listening, reading practice, focusing on learning English, concentrating, and increasing vocabulary by memorizing. In addition, students also think it is better to learn English since elementary school because it supports learning in junior high school to make it easier to understand and know more vocabulary. The findings are in line with Uematsu, 2012. The research found that early exposure to English can lead to higher test scores in vocabulary and grammar. Students who received substantial English instruction in elementary school showed advantages in these areas, although not always statistically significant. Other skills, such as listening and speaking, also improved. In particular, speaking test scores improved significantly over time, indicating that early learning can enhance oral language abilities by having early practice on it.

## CONCLUSION

After conducting and analyzing the research, the researcher found the effect of English as an optional subject in elementary school on English productive skills in junior high school students in grade 7 in SMPN 26 Kota Serang. In speaking

skills, the longer students are exposed to English as an optional subject in elementary school, the less their English speaking abilities grow in junior high school. It may even decrease indirectly because of the lack of practice and nervousness; next, in the writing skills, students who receive optional English lessons in elementary school struggle with writing English due to lack of vocabulary, incorrect vocabulary, miss grammar, and lack of mechanical writing. They can only describe a picture in one word or sentence, with an average score of 1 in grammar, accuracy, and mechanic writing. Ultimately, students struggle to improve their speaking and writing skills in junior high school due to the lack of active practice opportunities. This results in a lack of foundational skills and difficulty meeting higher standards at Junior High School. The lack of ability in productive skills of junior high school students who study English as an optional subject in elementary school is caused by a lack of practice and not getting basic material about the skill. Thus, English lessons at the elementary school level are essential to strengthen students' basic English and support their English language skills productively at the next level of education.

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