

TEACHING AT THE RIGHT LEVEL'S IMPACT ON ELEMENTARY STUDENTS' ENGLISH SKILLS: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the impact of implementing the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) method on the development of English language skills of elementary school students at English House Makassar. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach. The subjects consisted of three Beginner 1 Elementary Level students and one instructor. Data were collected through documentation of learning outcomes, classroom observations, and interviews with the teacher. The results indicate that the application of the TaRL method positively impacted the development of students' vocabulary, grammar, speaking, reading, and writing skills which mostly previous researchers identify single element of the improvement. Furthermore, students demonstrated active participation, high enthusiasm, and increased motivation and confidence. The teacher assessed that this method facilitates the learning process as materials and strategies can be tailored to students' actual abilities, although its implementation demands high creativity and faces challenges related to differences in student motivation. This study concludes that TaRL is relevant for application in elementary-level English language learning, particularly due to its ability to create more inclusive, structured, and enjoyable learning. This research recommends that the TaRL method be more widely developed for subjects based on foundational skills, supported by creative learning media appropriate to the students' ability levels.

Keywords: Elementary School Students, English Language Skills, Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)

INTRODUCTION

Proficiency in English from elementary school age is a crucial foundation for students' success in learning the language at subsequent levels (Chavez et al., 2023; Santos et al., 2022). In the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), children often face challenges such as limited vocabulary (Alenezi et al., 2023; Oktavia et al., 2022), difficulties with sentence structure (Liang et al., 2025; Prošić-Santovac & Savić, 2022), and low confidence in speaking (Alenezi et al., 2023; Günes & Sarigöz, 2021). Therefore, learning strategies that adapt to the actual capacity and learning needs of students are necessary, rather than merely following formal grade levels (El-Sabagh, 2021; Masruddin et al., 2025; Maulana et al., n.d.).

One relevant approach is Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL). This method was initially developed by the Pratham organization in India and has proven to significantly improve basic literacy and numeracy (James & Abubakar, 2024; Radhakrishnan et al., 2022). The main principle of TaRL is grouping students based on their mastery of foundational skills, not age or grade level, so that learning can be focused on what they truly need (Ananda Ismail et al., 2024; James & Abubakar, 2024). In the context of language learning, this approach encompasses vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing, and speaking skills (Colle et al., 2023; Ruqoiyyah & Surya Ningsih, 2023).

Various studies show that differentiating instruction based on ability levels can increase student motivation, participation, and learning outcomes (James & Abubakar, 2024; Mustafa et al., 2024; Radhakrishnan et al., 2022). However, most studies on TaRL still focus on improving basic literacy, such as reading and arithmetic, in formal schools. Meanwhile, the application of TaRL in learning English as a foreign language at the elementary school level, particularly in non-formal institutions, is still rarely researched.

Based on this gap, this study was conducted to analyze the impact of implementing the Teaching at the Right Level method on the development of English language skills of elementary school students in the context of a language course in Makassar. This research is expected to contribute to the development of English teaching practices for children through more adaptive, inclusive, and student-needs-oriented learning strategies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design (Creswell, 2009) to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) method in teaching English to elementary school students and its impact on their language development.

The research was conducted at English House Makassar, a non-formal English course, involving three elementary school students in the Beginner 1 level program and one instructor. The subjects were selected purposively based on their active participation and the availability of learning progress data. Data were collected over one month (four learning sessions) through documentation of student progress, classroom observations, and interviews with the instructor and students.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing to identify patterns and themes. To ensure validity, source triangulation was applied by comparing documentation, observation, and interview data, while member checking was conducted with the instructor to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. This process provided a comprehensive view of how the TaRL method influenced students' English skills in vocabulary, grammar, speaking, reading, and writing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Teacher's Understanding and Application of the TaRL Method

The teacher demonstrated a clear understanding of *Teaching at the Right Level* (TaRL) as instruction adapted to students' actual abilities rather than their formal grade levels. As the teacher explained:

"Teaching focuses on the students' ability level. The teacher provides instruction based on their skill level and needs, regardless of their grade level. This creates uniform class activities to achieve the same learning goals." (T)

The teacher also stated that applying this method facilitates the teaching process because students receive equal treatment even though there are differences in the pace of understanding the material:

"Using this method makes teaching easier because I give the same treatment to the students. Even though there are differences in how well they grasp the lesson, those who need it just require a little extra guidance." (T)

Student grouping was done through a basic skills pre-test, after which they were placed at a level according to the test results. Before learning began, the teacher prepared teaching materials appropriate to the students' ability levels:

"Before applying this method, what I do is a pre-test, then group them based on ability level. Then I prepare appropriate teaching materials and provide uniform instruction to the students." (T)

This approach aligns with Afandi et al., (2024), Putri & Muldash (2024) who emphasized the importance of baseline assessment as the foundation for differentiated learning.

2. Development of Students' English Language Skills

Analysis of learning outcome documents showed significant improvement in various aspects of English language skills. In the aspect of vocabulary, students were able to recognize, recall, and use simple vocabulary related to specific topics well. Student scores in this aspect ranged from 97-98. In grammar, all students scored 95, indicating a stable ability to construct simple sentences.

Observation results reinforced these findings, where students demonstrated fluency in speaking and confidence in responding to the teacher's questions. In reading and writing, students were able to read simple sentences fluently and copy and write vocabulary with correct spelling.

The interview with the teacher indicated that student progress was relatively even because they had been grouped according to ability from the start. The teacher assessed that although some students lagged slightly, they were able to catch up with additional guidance. Thus, TaRL helped create more consistent development among students. The teacher highlighted this consistency:

“In my opinion, the students' development is equal. Even if some fall behind, they can catch up easily with just a little guidance.” (T)

This finding resonates with (Ananda Ismail et al., 2024) who found that TaRL fosters steady progress among students by addressing learning disparities early. It also extends the scope of TaRL research, which has primarily focused on literacy and numeracy, into the domain of foreign language acquisition at the elementary level.

3. Student Participation and Motivation

Classroom observations revealed active participation and enthusiasm. The teacher confirmed this:

“They are always enthusiastic and actively participate in every class activity.” (T)

The teacher further elaborated that students' confidence grew because of a sense of equality in the classroom:

“Student interest greatly influences applying this method. Students feel there is an equal learning dynamic in the class. They get the same exercises, even the same materials, and the same treatment from the teacher. This minimizes jealousy or feelings that someone else is getting more attention” (T)

This supports Afandi et al. (2024) and Ananda Ismail et al. (2024) who argued that TaRL enhances not only cognitive outcomes but also student motivation and engagement. In

an EFL context, this is particularly significant, as motivation and self-confidence are vital factors in language learning success (Dörnyei, 2005).

4. Challenges in Implementing TaRL

Although positive results were achieved, the teacher acknowledged challenges in implementing the TaRL method. The teacher explained that differences in student motivation posed difficulties even when academic abilities were similar:

“Based on my experience, even if the students' abilities in a class are similar, their motivation can sometimes differ, which becomes a fairly challenging obstacle in teaching. This is something a teacher can't predict, so it requires a lot of preparation to overcome it or a supportive approach.” (T)

The teacher also emphasized the demand for creativity in lesson planning, as each group may require different teaching strategies despite being on the same level. This reflects the findings of Mustafa et al. (2024), who highlighted teacher workload and creativity as key challenges in the implementation of TaRL.

5. Advantages, Disadvantages, and Recommendations

The teacher described the advantages and disadvantages of TaRL as follow:

“The advantage is that students can learn in a structured way from things they don't yet understand, making it easier to follow the lessons. The disadvantage is that in applying this method, teachers are required to be more creative in preparing teaching strategies, like materials and tools used. Because each group needs different approaches.” (T)

When asked about broader application, the teacher recommended TaRL for subjects emphasizing foundational skills:

T : I recommend this method only for certain subjects, like English and math. And I highly recommend this method because it really helps keep students motivated. Since everyone in the group is at the same level, if someone falls behind, they can easily catch up.”

This is consistent with James & Abubakar (2024) and Muammar et al. (2023), who noted that TaRL is particularly effective in foundational subjects. The teacher's recommendation to integrate creative learning media also echoes Putri & Muldash (2024) who argued that diverse and engaging resources are essential for maintaining student interest in differentiated learning environments.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the implementation of the Teaching at the Right Level

(TaRL) method has a positive impact on the development of English language skills among elementary school students at English House Makassar. Based on the analysis of documents, observations, and interviews with the teacher, it was found that all students showed improvement in the aspects of vocabulary, grammar, speaking, reading, and writing. Students also exhibited active participation, high enthusiasm, and increased confidence in using English. The application of the TaRL method allows teachers to adapt learning materials and strategies to the actual abilities of students, not just based on age or grade level. This strategy creates a more inclusive, enjoyable, and effective learning atmosphere. Although challenges exist, particularly related to differences in student motivation and the demand for teacher creativity in preparing materials, this method proves relevant in the context of elementary-level English language learning.

The teacher assessed that the strength of TaRL lies in its ability to provide structured learning tailored to student needs, while its weakness lies in the high demands placed on teacher creativity. Therefore, this study recommends that the TaRL method be applied more broadly, particularly in subjects emphasizing basic skills such as English and Mathematics, supported by the exploration of creative learning media to make learning more engaging and effective.

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