

**TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON ELECTIVE
ENGLISH PROGRAMS: INSIGHTS FROM
AN INDONESIAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

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ABSTRACT

The Elective English Class complements regular English instruction by providing additional opportunities to develop communicative competence in a supportive learning environment. This study explores teachers' and students' perspectives on the implementation of Elective English Class at SMP Muhammadiyah 4 Yogyakarta and identifies challenges encountered during the learning process. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, involving one English teacher and eight purposively selected seventh-grade students enrolled in the elective class. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate generally positive perceptions from both participants. The teacher viewed the Elective English Class as a flexible space that enabled the use of Discovery Learning, collaborative activities, and supportive classroom practices to accommodate mixed-ability learners. From the students' perspective, the elective class enhanced speaking confidence, vocabulary development, and motivation, largely due to interactive and low-anxiety learning activities. Nevertheless, several challenges were identified, including differences in students' English proficiency levels, limited instructional time, and constraints related to learning facilities and media use. Overall, the findings suggest that the Elective English Class functions as a pedagogically flexible enrichment program that enhances communicative development. However, its long-term impact depends on sustained instructional adaptation and institutional support.

Keywords: Elective English Class, Junior High School, Qualitative Descriptive Study, Students' Perspectives, Teachers' Perspectives

A. INTRODUCTION

English plays a crucial role in contemporary education as it supports students' access to knowledge, global communication, and academic development. In many educational contexts, English proficiency is considered an essential skill that enables learners to participate in international academic and professional environments (Andayani, 2022; Clement & Murugavel, 2018). In the context of junior high school education, English learning helps students begin developing foundational communicative skills in a foreign

language. At this stage, learning is not limited to the acquisition of basic vocabulary and grammatical structures but also involves meaningful exposure and opportunities to use the language in communicative contexts.

However, in many formal school settings, regular English classes are constrained by limited instructional time and rigid curricular demands, which often restrict opportunities for extended practice and differentiated learning. As a result, students with varying levels of proficiency and motivation may not receive adequate support to develop their communicative competence effectively (Clayton, 2022; Irham, 2023; Jiang & Zhang, 2019). To address these limitations, many schools implement enrichment programs or elective English classes as complementary learning spaces beyond regular classroom instruction. These programs provide additional opportunities for extended practice in more flexible and interactive settings, supporting learners' communicative engagement and affective development (Chen, 2019; Harzanah et al., 2024).

SMP Muhammadiyah 4 Yogyakarta implements an Elective English Class as part of its effort to enhance students' English learning experiences beyond the standard curriculum. This program aims to develop students' communicative competence in both spoken and written forms while fostering confidence and active participation. Learning activities include vocabulary enrichment, speaking practice, project-based tasks, and interactive classroom activities that encourage students to use English meaningfully. The program is designed as a supportive learning environment that encourages students to experiment with language use with reduced anxiety, aligning with communicative language teaching principles that emphasize fluency and confidence development (Zulfah & Novitasari, 2025). The implementation of the Elective English Class is supported by the use of digital learning materials developed in collaboration with Universitas Ahmad Dahlan (UAD). These materials are organized in an e-module aligned with the Grade 7 English curriculum and designed to support active and scaffolded language (Harahap & Kembaren, 2023; Lim & Yunus, 2021).

Despite having a structured curriculum and clear instructional objectives, the effectiveness of an educational program cannot be evaluated solely based on its design. Teachers' and students' perceptions play a crucial role in shaping how a program functions in practice, as perception influences motivation, engagement, confidence, and classroom participation in language learning (Jiang & Zhang, 2019; You et al., 2016). Previous studies have emphasized the importance of students' perceptions in enrichment and extracurricular English learning contexts, such as English clubs and bilingual programs, which are generally perceived as supportive for developing speaking confidence and communicative skills despite challenges related to time constraints, classroom management, and facilities. However, limited scholarly attention has been directed toward elective English classes formally integrated into the school curriculum, particularly at the junior high school level. Existing studies have largely focused on extracurricular or informal enrichment programs, with limited examination of elective classes embedded within the academic timetable. Moreover, few studies simultaneously investigate both teachers' and students' perspectives, especially within digitally supported learning contexts. This gap highlights the need for context-specific research that explores how formally integrated elective English classes function pedagogically and experientially in real classroom settings (Saputra et al., 2025).

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore teachers' and students' perspectives on the implementation of this elective program at SMP Muhammadiyah 4 Yogyakarta, as well as the challenges encountered during the learning process. Using a qualitative descriptive approach involving classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, this research seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of how the program is experienced by both teachers and students. By examining a formally integrated elective program within the official school timetable, this study extends existing EFL research beyond extracurricular contexts and illuminates the pedagogical and affective dimensions of structured enrichment programs (Teveoğlu & Korkmaz, 2024), particularly regarding instructional flexibility and digitally supported classroom practices within formally integrated enrichment programs.

B. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore teachers' and students' perspectives on the implementation of the Elective English Class at SMP Muhammadiyah 4 Yogyakarta. This design was chosen to obtain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges within a natural classroom setting, enabling the exploration of subjective meanings and contextual dynamics. The study was conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah 4 Yogyakarta during the 2024/2025 academic year, focusing on a Grade VII Elective English Class consisting of 23 students. Eight students were selected as interview participants using purposive sampling, based on differences in classroom participation, speaking confidence, and learning engagement, to ensure varied perspectives. In addition, one English teacher who was responsible for teaching the Elective English Class participated in the study. The inclusion of a single teacher aligns with qualitative research principles that prioritize depth of insight over statistical generalization.

Data were collected using classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observation allows researchers to systematically examine teaching and learning processes in natural settings (O'Leary, 2020), while semi-structured interviews provide flexibility to explore participants' experiences in depth (Kallio et al., 2016). Observation guidelines focused on instructional strategies, classroom interaction, student engagement, and the use of learning materials and digital media. Separate interview guides were developed for the teacher and students. Student interviews explored learning experiences, motivation, perceived language development, and challenges encountered during the Elective English Class, while the teacher interview focused on instructional practices, perceived benefits, and challenges in implementing the program.

Classroom observations were conducted during three Elective English Class meetings, each lasting approximately 60 minutes, with the researcher acting as a non-participant observer to minimize disruption to the learning process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted after the observations, with the teacher interview lasting approximately 30–45 minutes and student interviews lasting 10–15 minutes, conducted individually in the school library. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian to ensure participants' comfort, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. To enhance trustworthiness, data triangulation was employed through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. In addition, interview transcripts were reviewed for accuracy, and recurring patterns were cross-checked between observation notes and interview data to enhance credibility.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles et al., (2014), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis involved iterative coding and constant comparison across data sources to identify recurring patterns and thematic relationships. Observation notes and interview transcripts were systematically coded to organize similar responses into broader thematic interpretations related to teaching strategies, student engagement, language development, and instructional challenges. Ethical clearance was obtained from the school administration prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and participants' identities were anonymized using initials. All research data were securely stored and used solely for academic research purposes.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion derived from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with the English teacher and students participating in the Elective English Class at SMP Muhammadiyah 4 Yogyakarta. The findings are organized into three main aspects: (1) teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the Elective English Class, (2) students' perspectives on their learning experiences, and (3) challenges encountered by both teachers and students during the implementation of the program.

1. Teachers' Perspectives on the Implementation of the Elective English Class

Teachers' perspectives offer important insights into how the Elective English Class is implemented and managed in practice. These viewpoints highlight the program's pedagogical orientation, classroom dynamics, and practical challenges. To present these findings clearly, the discussion of teachers' perspectives is organized into four subsections: 1) pedagogical flexibility and adaptive instruction, (2) integration of Discovery Learning, collaboration, and strategic L1 support, (3) creation of a supportive and low-anxiety learning environment, and (4) responses to mixed-ability and structural constraints.

Pedagogical Flexibility and Adaptive Instruction in the Elective English Class

Based on the interview with the English teacher, the Elective English Class was perceived as a flexible and adaptive learning program that provided greater pedagogical freedom compared to regular English classes. The teacher viewed the elective class as a space to better accommodate students' needs, interests, and learning characteristics. As the teacher stated,

“The elective class allows me to adjust the teaching strategies based on students' responses and classroom dynamics, not strictly following one fixed method”

(T1 - interview, January 2026)

This finding was also supported by classroom observation data, which showed that the teacher applied varied instructional strategies, including group discussions, short games, and mini-project activities across different meetings. These variations indicate that the teacher did not rely on a single fixed method but continuously adjusted the teaching approach based on classroom dynamics. Such flexibility was also evident in how the teacher responded to students' engagement and participation during the lessons, allowing more effective adaptation to students' learning progress and classroom conditions, which is considered essential for fostering meaningful learning experiences and sustaining students' motivation (Abduh et al., 2022; Guler, 2020).

Integration of Discovery Learning, Collaboration, and Strategic L1 Support in the Elective English Class

The findings showed that the teacher emphasized that Discovery Learning served as the core instructional approach in the elective class. Through this method, students were encouraged to actively explore language features such as vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and text structures by analyzing dialogues and short texts (Jeon & Lee, 2017). The teacher explained,

“I mostly use Discovery Learning because students become more active in finding language patterns by themselves, such as identifying grammar and vocabulary from texts or dialogues”

(T1 - interview, January 2026)

This finding was further supported by classroom observations, where students were actively engaged in identifying vocabulary and language patterns from short texts and dialogues. The teacher facilitated the process by guiding students through questions rather than directly providing explanations. Such classroom practices indicate that Discovery Learning was implemented in a structured and scaffolded manner, allowing students to actively construct their understanding while still receiving necessary support from the teacher. This approach positioned students as active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of information, aligning with student-centered learning principles (Orosz et al., 2021).

In practice, Discovery Learning was frequently combined with Collaborative Learning and integrated within a Genre-Based Approach, particularly during the stages of Building Knowledge of the Text and Joint Construction. Pair work and group discussions were used to scaffold students who still required guidance, while students with higher proficiency levels were occasionally given more challenging tasks (Laoli, 2024; Luo, 2017). The teacher noted,

“In one lesson plan, I can combine approaches and methods Discovery Learning, collaborative work, and sometimes problem-based or project-based tasks depending on the students’ abilities”

(T1 - interview, January 2026)

This instructional blending reflects an effort to accommodate mixed-ability learners and aligns with the principles of differentiated instruction.

Supportive and Low-Anxiety Learning Environment within the Elective English Class

Another important aspect of the Elective English Class highlighted by the teacher was the intentional creation of a supportive and low-anxiety learning environment. The teacher did not impose strict rules requiring students to speak English at all times. Instead, the teacher consistently modeled English, particularly for classroom instructions and routine interactions, while prioritizing students’ comprehension. As explained by the teacher,

“I don’t force students to speak English all the time, but I model English consistently so they understand the instructions first before producing the language”

(T1 - interview, January 2026)

This strategy aimed to strengthen students' receptive skills and reduce anxiety, creating a low-anxiety learning environment that is especially important for young language learners (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Yu et al., 2023).

The teacher also highlighted the importance of classroom management strategies in maintaining students' focus and engagement. Establishing classroom agreements, using ice-breaking activities, and incorporating short games at the beginning of lessons were perceived as effective ways to prepare students emotionally for learning (Hao et al., 2019; Himawati et al., 2025). The teacher stated,

“At the beginning of the lesson, I usually use simple games or ice-breaking activities so students can focus and feel more engaged before learning”

(T1 - interview, January 2026)

This was also evident during classroom observations, where students appeared more relaxed and willing to participate after engaging in these activities. The use of simple games at the beginning of the lesson contributed to creating a positive classroom atmosphere and increased students' readiness to learn. Such strategies supported students' motivation and willingness to participate actively, particularly in speaking activities.

Addressing Mixed-Ability Challenges and Structural Constraints in the Elective English Class

Despite the advantages offered by the Elective English Class, the teacher also identified several challenges related to implementing the program. These included managing mixed-ability learners, working within limited instructional time, and navigating facility constraints. Such conditions required the teacher to frequently adjust instructional strategies to ensure equitable participation and comprehension.

In terms of evaluation, the teacher reported engaging in continuous reflection based on students' feedback and learning outcomes. Instructional strategies were modified when they were perceived as ineffective in a particular class (Martin & Rosas-Maldonado, 2019). As the teacher explained,

“If a method works in one class, it doesn't always work in another, so I evaluate it based on students' responses and then adjust it in the next meeting”

(T1 - interview, January 2026)

This reflective practice indicates that students' learning responses played a central role in shaping instructional decisions within the elective program. Overall, the teacher perceived the Elective English Class as a meaningful space to experiment with varied teaching strategies, promote active learning, and implement differentiated instruction beyond the constraints of regular English classes (Utomo et al., 2020).

The results indicate that the program serves as a pedagogically flexible space that enables teachers to adapt instructional strategies to students' needs, thereby supporting active learning and differentiated instruction beyond the constraints of regular English classes. This finding suggests that formally integrated elective classes may offer structural advantages over regular English lessons by allowing greater instructional experimentation and adaptive pedagogical decision-making.

2. Students' Perspectives on Learning in the Elective English Class

Students' perspectives were explored through semi-structured interviews with eight selected students representing varied levels of participation and speaking confidence in the Elective English Class. The thematic analysis generated three major themes describing how students perceived their learning experiences within the program.

Supportive and Low-Anxiety Learning Environment in the Elective English Class

Many students perceived the elective class as a more relaxed and supportive learning environment. They reported feeling less anxious when using English because mistakes were treated as part of the learning process rather than as failures. One student explained,

"In this class, I am not too afraid of making mistakes because the teacher is patient and supportive, so I want to try speaking English" (S3 - interview, November 2025)

This finding was consistent with classroom observation data, which showed that students were generally not hesitant to respond during classroom interactions, even when their answers were not fully accurate. Such conditions suggest that a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere played an important role in encouraging students' willingness to communicate, which is widely recognized as a key factor in second language learning (Cho et al., 2023).

Interactive and Collaborative Learning Activities in the Elective English Class

Students also highlighted the importance of interactive learning activities in shaping their positive learning experiences. Group discussions, games, and role-play activities were frequently mentioned as enjoyable and motivating. These activities allowed students to practice English collaboratively, which reduced the pressure of speaking individually. As one student noted,

"I like group work because we can help each other and practice together. It feels easier than speaking alone" (S5 - interview, November 2025)

This pattern was also observable during classroom sessions, where students were actively involved in group discussions and collaborative tasks. Many students were seen helping each other, asking questions, and participating more confidently when working in groups.

Such collaborative activities align with communicative language teaching principles that emphasize meaningful interaction and learner engagement.

Development of Communicative Confidence and Vocabulary in the Elective English Class

In terms of perceived language development, many students reported noticeable improvement in speaking confidence and vocabulary mastery. Several students stated that they became more willing to express their ideas orally, even when their grammatical accuracy was not yet perfect. This perception suggests that the elective class emphasized communicative competence rather than rigid accuracy. One student shared,

"I can speak more confidently now, even though sometimes my grammar is still wrong" (S6 - interview, November 2025)

This was further reflected in classroom observations, where several students attempted to use English during activities, although some still mixed it with Indonesian or paused due to limited vocabulary. This finding suggests that the Elective English Class places greater emphasis on communicative competence and fluency rather than rigid grammatical precision, supporting the view that confidence and fluency are essential foundations for developing oral communication skills in language learners. However, this also reflects common difficulties faced by EFL learners, particularly when exposure to English outside the classroom is limited. Several students reported that they rarely used English beyond classroom activities, which affected their vocabulary retention and speaking fluency. Although the elective class provided valuable opportunities for practice, limited exposure outside school made it difficult for students to maintain progress. Nevertheless, these challenges were generally perceived as part of the learning process, and students appreciated the teacher's constructive feedback, which they found motivating rather than discouraging (Cho et al., 2023). Despite these constraints, the combination of a supportive classroom atmosphere, interactive activities, and communicative practice contributed to positive learning experiences. Students reported increased confidence, motivation, and willingness to communicate, suggesting that affective factors particularly reduced anxiety and enhanced willingness to communicate play a central mediating role in shaping perceived language development within elective learning contexts (Sebina & Arua, 2017).

Overall, students expressed positive perceptions of the learning experience and consistently described the elective class as different from regular English lessons, particularly in terms of classroom atmosphere, learning activities, and opportunities for active language use (Chuang et al., 2018).

3. Challenges in Implementing and Participating in the Elective English Class

Despite the generally positive perceptions toward the Elective English Class, both the teacher and students identified several challenges during its implementation. These challenges were related to learner diversity, instructional constraints, and contextual factors within the classroom (Deocampo, 2020).

Learner Diversity in the Elective English Class

One of the main challenges concerned the heterogeneity of students' language proficiency and learning styles. The teacher reported that students demonstrated varied levels of English mastery as well as different learning preferences, such as auditory and visual styles (Umansky, 2016). This condition required continuous instructional adjustment to ensure that all students could follow the lesson. As the teacher explained,

“Students have different learning styles and different levels of ability, so I need to combine various skills and media to make sure everyone is facilitated.”

(T1 - interview, January 2026)

Such conditions were also reflected in classroom observations, where some students were able to respond quickly using English, while others required more time and support, particularly in understanding instructions and expressing their ideas. This finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that mixed-ability classrooms demand flexible teaching strategies and multimodal instruction to support diverse learners (Marzulina, 2021; Morita-Mullaney et al., 2020).

Instructional Clarity and Comprehension Barriers in the Elective English Class

Another challenge involved instructional clarity and repetition. Because English was frequently used as the medium of instruction, some students required repeated explanations to fully understand classroom instructions (Freeman, 2017). The teacher acknowledged this issue, stating,

“I often have to repeat instructions several times and sometimes mix English with Indonesian so that all students can understand.” (T1 - interview, January 2026)

This issue was also evident during classroom sessions, where the teacher occasionally needed to repeat instructions or switch to Indonesian to ensure students’ understanding. From the students’ perspective, this difficulty was closely related to limited vocabulary and unfamiliar language exposure. One student noted,

“Sometimes I understand the instruction, but if it is only in English, I need it to be explained again.” (S4 - interview, November 2025)

This challenge reflects the tension between maximizing target language exposure and maintaining learners’ comprehension, a common issue in foreign language classrooms (Graves et al., 1983; Wong, 2018)

Time Constraints and Speaking-Related Difficulties in the Elective English Class

Time limitation was also identified as a significant challenge. The elective class was conducted within a restricted duration, which limited opportunities for extended speaking practice and deeper exploration of learning materials. Both teacher and students emphasized that speaking skills require frequent repetition and practice. A student stated,

“If we do not practice again at home, it is easy to forget.” (S7 - interview, November 2025)

This condition supports Nation’s (2013) argument that language development, particularly vocabulary and speaking fluency, requires sufficient time and repeated exposure that may not always be achievable within limited classroom hours.

From the students’ perspective, speaking anxiety and limited vocabulary mastery were major challenges. Several students reported feeling afraid of making mistakes or mispronouncing words during speaking activities. As one student expressed,

“I feel shy and afraid of making mistakes when speaking English.” (S2 - interview, November 2025)

Another student highlighted vocabulary-related difficulty, saying,

“Sometimes I forget the words when I want to speak.” (S6 - interview, November 2025)

In addition, limited vocabulary was frequently reported as a challenge during spontaneous speaking activities. Students often struggled to recall appropriate words, which caused hesitation and reduced fluency (Chou, 2021; Hao, 2016). As one student explained,

"Sometimes I know what I want to say, but I forget the English words, so I stop speaking"
(S1 - interview, November 2025)

During classroom observations, some students showed hesitation when speaking, including pauses, code-switching, and difficulty recalling vocabulary, which affected their fluency. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and limited lexical knowledge can hinder students' oral performance (Ticheloven et al., 2021; Zou, 2020).

Contextual and Technological Constraints in the Elective English Class

Learning facilities and technological constraints were mentioned as contextual challenges. Although digital media were frequently used, unstable internet access occasionally limited the effectiveness of technology-based learning. The teacher emphasized the need for better infrastructure, noting,

"More stable internet access and proper language learning facilities would really help support the activities in this class."
(T1 - interview, January 2026)

This constraint was also observed in classroom practice, particularly when the use of digital media was disrupted by unstable internet access, which limited the smooth implementation of technology-based activities. This challenge echoes earlier studies highlighting the importance of adequate facilities in supporting technology-enhanced language learning (Abrar et al., 2018; Rao & Chen, 2020).

Taken together, while the challenges did not prevent the successful implementation of the Elective English Class, they required continuous reflection and adaptation from both teacher and students. Rather than being perceived as obstacles, these challenges were viewed as areas for improvement that could enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning when appropriately addressed. These challenges highlight the need for continuous pedagogical adaptation and sustained institutional support to ensure that elective English programs can effectively accommodate diverse learner needs and maximize their potential benefits beyond regular classroom instruction.

D. CONCLUSION

This study explored the implementation of an Elective English Class and examined teachers' and students' perspectives on its instructional practices, learning experiences, and challenges. The findings reveal that the program provides a flexible and communicative learning environment that encourages students' engagement, confidence, and willingness to use English through interactive and student-centered strategies, while also supporting the development of communicative competence and fostering a positive learning atmosphere. Pedagogically, the study highlights the importance of adaptive teaching strategies, differentiated instruction, and interactive learning activities in addressing diverse learner needs and enhancing engagement beyond the constraints of regular classroom instruction. However, this study has several limitations, as it was conducted in a single school context with a limited number of participants, which may restrict the broader applicability of the findings. Therefore, future research is recommended to examine the long-term impact of elective English programs on students' language development through longitudinal or mixed-method designs, as well as comparative studies across different educational contexts.

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