

## OPTIMIZING ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS TO YOUNG LEARNERS (A CASE STUDY IN CIMAHI)

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### Abstract

Having competencies on teaching English to young learners (TEYL), the teachers will be able to design materials, to teach well, and to suggest what approaches, methods, and techniques to be used. However, TEYL should not be done without careful planning and preparation. This study investigated TEYL process in Cimahi. It is intended to identify and analyze English teaching and learning process in Elementary and Kindergarten, teachers' perception towards TEYL, and students' responses toward English lesson. The study reported here made use of qualitative research design as its method, while the instruments were questionnaire, observations, and interview. There were 3 teachers of Kindergarten and Elementary school chosen based on purposive sampling technique as the subject of the research.

**Keywords:** English for Young Learners, Kindergarten, Elementary School

### Abstrak

Memiliki kompetensi dalam mengajar Bahasa Inggris untuk anak (TEYL), para guru akan dapat merancang materi, mengajar dengan baik, dan menentukan pendekatan, metode, dan teknik apa yang akan digunakan. Namun, pembelajaran untuk anak itu tidak boleh dilaksanakan tanpa perencanaan dan persiapan yang matang. Penelitian ini menyelidiki proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris untuk anak di Cimahi. Proses pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di SD dan TK, persepsi guru terhadap pengajaran bahasa Inggris untuk anak, dan tanggapan siswa terhadap pelajaran bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode desain penelitian kualitatif, sedangkan instrumennya adalah kuesioner, observasi, dan wawancara. Guru TK dan SD dipilih berdasarkan purposive sampling sebagai subjek dari penelitian ini.

**Kata Kunci:** Bahasa Inggris untuk anak, Sekolah TK, Sekolah Dasar

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## INTRODUCTION

A global survey for the British Council in 2013, Shelagh Rixon in Bland (2015) reports that English was being taught at every younger ages, putting pressure on educational resources across the world. Many countries also introduce English to children in pre-primary settings, such as in kindergarten and preschool. In other words, the teaching and learning of English for young learners provides the students' English language competencies in the golden age—the age that children can learn anything easily. Children are able to learn anything as long as the learning material is presented in a comprehensible way. Teaching English also encourages enjoyment and motivation for language learning, especially when it is presented in a fun way. In addition, children can also promote learning about other cultures and develop their cognitive skills as well as developing their metalinguistic awareness. In this case, teachers have the most important roles in creating an encouraging emotional atmosphere in the classroom.

Having competencies on TEYL, the teachers will be able to design materials, to teach well, and to suggest what approaches, methods, and techniques to be used. However, TEYL should not be done without careful planning and preparation. These young learners are socially, emotionally, cognitively, and physically different from adult learners. Graddol (2006) states that TEYL requires teachers who are proficient in English, have wider training in child development, and who are able to motivate young children. In line with this, having good and suitable learning materials for young learners are important aspects and will make the teaching-learning process be effective and meaningful. Moon in Juhana (2014) states that young learners need to be exposed to a variety of uses English around them, both spoken and written. It can be concluded that so many aspects influence teaching- learning process, especially to young learners.

A preliminary study in Cimahi area revealed there are some problems faced by Kindergarten teachers or early childhood education teachers or Elementary teachers in teaching English. Most of them are graduated from Early Childhood Education Program (PG. PAUD) and some of the teachers are graduated from other majors such as S1 Math, Bahasa Indonesia, and basic education. Therefore, they are lack of competencies on TEYL. Based on this phenomena, this research was conducted to find factual information about English teaching and learning process in elementary and kindergarten, teachers' perception towards teaching English to young learners, and students' responses on English lesson

The most important characteristics of young learner are their tendency to be active, some of them are more active than others. Teacher should be concerned about children whose behavior is extremely passive or active. Another characteristic of children that is almost noticeable as their high level of activity and tendency to be curious. Young language learners are able to make some decisions about their own learning and they have defined views about what they like and do not like doing (Penny McKay, 2008). Children learn other language better than adults and this is often used to support the early introduction of foreign language teaching. Ellis (2013) states that in the education systems, young learners are children who are in primary or elementary school. Unlike adult learners who can concentrate hours and hours on the topic they are working on, children can hold their attention for about 15 to 20 minutes only. This relatively short attention span has a great implication for teaching procedures.

To make situation of the TEYL communicative, the English teachers should comprehend the communicative principles which are proposed by John and Morrow (1983: 60-64) in Sukarno, (2008). They are: know what you are doing, the whole is more than the sum of the parts, the processes are as important as the forms, to learn it, do it, and mistakes are not always a mistake. Regarding teacher skills and knowledge, moreover Bland (2015) argues it is important that opportunities are created in the classroom for children to be exposed to natural language and to interact with each other. In order to create these ideal conditions for learning, teachers need to be equipped with methodological skills and knowledge and to be competent in English. Teachers' confidence and willingness to use the language naturally in the classroom is a key component of success. The primary class teacher who delivers the rest of the curriculum and who has a good knowledge of the children as well as the language is its best position to succeed.

In line with this, Bland (2015) claims some benefits from foreign language learning: develop children's communication abilities in English, encourage enjoyment and motivation, promote learning about other cultures, develop children's cognitive skills, develop children's metalinguistic awareness, encourage learning to learn, develop intercultural awareness and global citizenship, and develop values related to diversity.

According to Damayanti (2016) teaching and learning English as a foreign language has different learning situations, such as limited time allocated to English lessons, large class size, students' low motivation, and form-focused exams. Classroom management can be defined as the teacher's ability to cooperatively manage time, space, resources and student roles and student behaviors to provide a climate that encourages learning. As many young teachers know, classroom management plays an important role in their English teaching. It can be said that effective classroom management in young learners English teaching means successful teaching and learning. In line with this, Watson in Bland (2015) argues that whole language is an approach on language and learning listening, speaking, reading, writing should be integrated and it should emphasized learning to read and write naturally with a focus on real communication and reading and writing for pleasure.

Furthermore, Musthafa (2010) elaborates the requirements for effective teaching English to young learners. They are as follow:

- a. English should be used all the time to ensure that children have relatively much exposure to English.
- b. The print-rich environment in English should be created and around the classroom.
- c. Teachers of EYL should use activity-based teaching-learning techniques such as TPR, games, & projects.
- d. The teachers should use various techniques for short periods of time to maintain the interest level of the children in engaging the English lessons.
- e. The teachers should focus on functional English for vocabulary development & for immediate fulfillment of communicative needs of the learners.
- f. The teachers should reiterate often to ensure the acquisition of English expressions/vocabulary items.
- g. The teachers should provide useful, acquisition-promoting routines.
- h. The teachers should have a good command of English & have the ability to act as a role model for the learners they teach.

As nobody has ever successfully acquired a foreign language without either needing or wanting to, it is very important that materials for young learners persuade them to want to learn the language. This can only be achieved if the experience of learning the language is positive and enjoyable and it helps increase the learners' confidence and self-esteem (Arnold & Brown in Garton, Sue & Copland, 2019).

## **METHOD**

This research was conducted within 3 months (from March - June 2019). There were 3 teachers chosen as the subjects of this study. They were: a teacher at a public elementary school, a teacher at a private elementary school, and a teacher at a private Kindergarten in Cimahi area. The subjects were selected using Purposive Sampling techniques. Purposive Sampling is a technique of determining the sample with certain considerations. The reason for selecting the three samples is because of the accessible factor; the access was easier, the atmosphere was more conducive, therefore the researchers could obtain more comprehensive data (Sugiyono, 2017).

This research used a descriptive qualitative approach. Qualitative research method is a research method based on the philosophy of positivism, used to examine natural object conditions (as opposed to experiments) where the researcher is the key instrument, purposive and snowball sampling, data collection techniques, data analysis inductive/qualitative, and the results of qualitative research emphasize more meaning than generalization, (Sugiyono, 2017).

Furthermore, the data used in this study were primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from respondents (English teacher) by using observations, questionnaires, and interviews as the instruments. While secondary data were taken from some references related to this study. Then it was compiled and analyzed the phenomena that occurred, then drew the conclusions from the study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

#### **English Teaching and Learning Process in Elementary and Kindergarten**

Young learners are like sponges, they grasp everything we say and how we say it. There has been a growing awareness acknowledging that teaching English to young learners is not as simple as we once thought. It is not a matter of teaching a list of simple vocabulary. It needs optimal condition and requirements that would enable young learners to further their learning, and eventually the aim of TEYL would be achieved. Some requirements that need to be consider are the curriculum, teacher competency, media and method used (Pransiska, 2016).

A Preliminary study was conducted by the researchers in some elementary schools & kindergartens in the Cimahi area, indicated the low competence of English teachers, teacher do not have an English education background, the learning process in the class that does not consider the characteristics of children, teachers' pronunciation are inappropriate, and lack of competence of teachers in choosing teaching techniques and media so that there are still many English language teachers who just teaching by translating English vocabulary into Indonesian, or vice versa, rather than using it in classroom communication.

The observations revealed that all of the teachers used the Indonesian language mostly in their instruction with the students. The use of English only occurs when giving praise by saying “good” to students. In Kindergarten, the use of English only occurs in songs and giving praise. It was also found that the pronunciation errors in English were made many times by the teacher, though she can manage the class well so that all students involved in class activity. On the other hand, a teacher at Elementary school had better pronunciation but poor class management. They tend to just sit down delivering the lesson, didn't go around, almost all of the learning time. There were 35-40 students in the class, who were busy with their own activities, not paying attention, and noisy. Another Elementary school teacher managed the class better than the previous one. He arranged the seating position of students with U-shape. He guided them to analyze the words to be translated, encouraged them to find out the meaning in English, encourage students to think, guess, before knowing what is right. Thus, the method of translation is used through an approach that encourages students to discover. Then, when the teacher delivering the lesson, he stood in front of the whiteboard, then he went around the class to check whether the students had finished working on the exercise or not. The teacher only repeated the material that students have understood. Both of the Elementary school teachers didn't use any teaching media when delivering the lesson, on the contrary, the Kindergarten teacher used media in her teaching. The teacher did not give feedback before the lesson ends. It is wise for the teacher to review the material they have learned on that day. In line with this, as Lenneberg in Pinter (2017) stated that the strengths of a child's brain plasticity will be better developed if the child is exposed to the environment that supports his/her language development.

With the condition of learning English which is still less children friendly, we can say that our teachers need knowledge about learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia so that the teaching-learning process could be more effective. In the long run, it can equip students with a fun, more meaningful learning experience in English.

Regarding this, Cahyati (2018) recommends that teachers should maximize classroom interactions in order to achieve better results in teaching and learning English. When the teachers are about to teach, they should greet students regularly. According to the observation, teachers sometimes did not greet the students when started or ended the lesson. In fact, this activity gives a warming up and helps students to be more familiar with English. Teachers also should make more efforts in teaching English. Based on the observation, not all of the teachers had a good proficiency in teaching English and had teachers training background. Regarding the teacher's lack of competence, it is wise for the school to provide opportunities for the teachers to improve their teaching competences, for example, to provide them in-service teachers training so that it will improve the EFL education at elementary education to function to the full.

### **Teachers' Perception towards Teaching English to Young Learners**

Based on the result of the questionnaires, it showed that the age of the teachers were between 30-49 years, their educational backgrounds were Bachelor of PAUD (kindergarten teacher) and English education. They have been teaching for 5 to 13 years. In teaching, they took the learning materials and learning English resources from various sources, such as online media, books, dictionaries. One of the teachers took the learning resources from textbooks only. The teaching-learning process was based on the theme of learning in RPPH, and oral tests, while teachers at elementary school claimed their lessons were 80% theory and 20% practice. Unfortunately, the teachers often neglected the teaching methods suitable for young learners.

The Lesson Plans were made in the previous year/semester. The teacher in Kindergarten even did not know the teaching method she used, she just taught some English vocabulary and singing, whereas teachers at Elementary School applied Grammar Translation Method and the materials based on the KTSP theme. Furthermore, the teachers described that the students were still shame and fear to speak up, while Elementary School students had difficulties in applying the sentence structure in English (grammar). Lack of knowledge of teaching young learners could be the problem. The Kindergarten teacher stated that she never heard English for Young Learners teaching book for teachers, while teachers at elementary school claimed they ever heard but haven't read. All of them perceived that they need the book, to guide teachers in teaching English for children, facilitating some activities appropriate for their students.

Meanwhile, the observation revealed that English learning in elementary and kindergarten in Cimahi was relatively not optimal. The competence of English teachers is still low, not all of the English teacher has an English education background, the learning process in the class does not consider the characteristics of the children, teachers' problems in English pronunciation, and lack of teachers' competencies. The ability of teachers to open the class, deliver the lesson, and close the teaching-learning process is still dominated by using the Indonesian language. As persons who are the source of motivation for children, and model imitated by children, teachers need to be provided with methods/techniques, knowledge of children psychology, as well as the ability to manage good English teaching-learning process. Eventually, teachers should be more competent and able to develop children's abilities in English.

While the interview with the teachers elaborated that they have problem in choosing and using teaching media, classroom language as well. Regarding this, Pransiska (2016) explains that young learners are like sponges, they soak up everything we say and how we say it. There has been a growing awareness acknowledging that teaching English to young learners is not as simple as we once thought. It is not a matter of teaching a list of simple vocabulary. It needs optimal condition and requirements that would enable young learners to further their learning, and eventually the aim of teaching English to young learners would be achieved. Some requirements that need to be consider are the curriculum, teacher competency, media and method used. Stern in Damayanti (2016) states that children are good imitators. They are dependent on the model given to them by the teacher. Therefore the teacher should be able to be a good model. If not, the teacher will become the sorce of longterm desasters.

In line with this, Cahyati (2018) argues that Considering the more and more elementary schools offer English, it is imperative that these schools take into account the teacher's competence of teaching English at elementary education. In this case, the teacher's competence includes mastering the language, knowing how to teach at this level, knowing how to manage the class, and understanding the basic assumptions of children psychology. It is so because the teaching and learning English at this level needs particular skills and techniques. Otherwise, English teaching at Elementary Education will go unmonitored, and will only jeopardise its purpose. In other words, considering the students' readiness (cognitive level of the students), teachers' competencies, and school facilities are important in teaching English at the first grade. Furthermore she suggests it should be regarded that the teaching of listening and speaking precede the teaching of reading and writing. It is so because the teachers should consider the psychological aspects that for the beginner, the essential thing is "the association between the sound and the meaning" rather than "the association between the

sound and the orthography". Therefore, it is wise not to expect the first grade students to write some English words as expected in the English syllabus.

### **Students' Responses on English Lesson**

Students come to English lessons with expectations about what they are going to do and to get. These expectations are influenced by the expectation of their family, friends, and other students. They also want to please, they want to have immediate results. They expect to be able to speak some English after the lesson so that they are awarded by their parents and their friends. Based on the observation and interview, it showed that most of the students enjoy learning English. Most of the teachers try to explain the lesson as clear as possible. This effort results in the students' ability to understand some vocabulary and simple conversations in English and to write the meaning in Indonesian. The ability of teachers to open the class, deliver the lesson, and close the teaching-learning process is still dominated by using the Indonesian language rather than using English as the exposure to the students. So, it's hard to enable the students to become proficient and develop their skill and proficiency in English. Regarding this, Garton, Sue & Copland (2019) suggest that learners need to be exposed to language in use which is: comprehensible (sufficiently understandable for the learner to achieve their objective), rich (substantial in quantity and valuable in variety, meaningful (significance and value to the learners' lives), authentic (used for communication rather than for teaching, and recycled (experienced a number of times in a variety of ways).

This study also revealed that most of the target in the syllabus had been achieved and students could interact with teachers in simple English. However, there were some learning objectives that were not completely met the target in syllabus, such as problem in writing and reading words in English. There is a problem faced by the students in Kindergarten and the first grade that it is difficult to transfer the spoken to the written word. It is because English words are pronounced differently from Indonesian. In Indonesian, every single word is pronounced the same as its spelling (letter), while in English is not. Nevertheless, the students were able to comprehend some conversation in simple English, and at home they tended to "show off" their English to the parents or friends. It is wise for the teachers to consider the students' readiness. According to the Natural Approach, proposed by Krashen and Terrel, comprehension of language should precede production (listening should precede speaking); speaking and then writing will emerge when the language learner is ready and should not be forced.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the explanation above, it could be concluded that:

1. The process of teaching and learning English at Kindergarten and Elementary school is still dominated by using Indonesian language rather than using English as exposure to the students.
2. The teachers perceive that they have problem in English competencies. They admit that to achieve the learning target during learning process, they have to be capable of finding a way out or teaching technique and media how to attract and make his students enjoy learning as it is expected. They also agree having understood some literatures of TEYL, English teachers of young learners could understand how to teach English appropriately to young learners. By this, teachers could determine the effective and suitable teaching methods to their students and create a positive environment for English teaching. Introducing English at the lower age can be more

advantageous as long as some conditions to support it are met. Where the conditions are not satisfied, the reversed effects will be gained instead.

3. The students respond positively toward English lesson. Most of them enjoy learning English and they could interact with teachers in simple English. There is a problem faced by the students in Kindergarten and the first grade that it difficult to transfer the spoken to the written word

Finally, the researchers recommend that successful TEYL at Kindergarten and elementary school should be well supported financially, so that they can improve the quality of their English teachers and to provide the students with appropriate materials and relevant facilities.

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