

TEACHING ENGLISH FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD AT AMONG PUTRA II KINDERGARTEN

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the phenomenon of English learning in an early childhood environment in depth and the obstacles to teachers teaching English in early childhood. This research is defined as qualitative. This research uses direct observation methods and questionnaires to teachers at Among Putra II Kindergarten, Pacitan District. This study consists of 3 samples of teachers who teach English to early childhood. The results showed that there are methods for teachers teaching English in early childhood, such as singing, drawing, and innovative games. There are also obstacles teachers face teaching English in early childhood, such as difficulty managing the class, lack of student concentration, and the introduction of limited vocabulary. Teachers' strategies include applying constructive feedback, positive reinforcement, ice-breaking, and learning media.

Keywords: *Obstacles, Teaching English, Teaching Methods*

Introduction

Teaching English to young children is vital to their cognitive and linguistic development. The Critical Period Hypothesis, introduced by Lenneberg in 1967, indicates that young children excel at acquiring new languages due to their highly adaptable brains until puberty. This phase enables children to naturally grasp language, resulting in almost native-like pronunciation and grammar skills. Vygotsky's Social Interactionist Theory (1934) underscores the significance of early language acquisition through social engagement with knowledgeable individuals like parents and educators. Chomsky's Theory of Universal Grammar (1957) argues that children possess an inherent grasp of language structure from birth, emphasizing the benefits of early exposure to English in developing this innate skill. Additionally, Piaget's studies (1923) reveal that early childhood is characterized by rapid cognitive development, and learning a second language can enhance critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. Thus, introducing English education during early childhood fosters bilingualism and bolsters overall cognitive and social growth.

As per developmental psychologist Jean Piaget (1930-1950), effective early childhood education should align with children's cognitive development traits. Piaget emphasizes learning through direct experiences and active exploration. Young children thrive when engaged with their surroundings, so teaching methods should include hands-on activities that allow them to interact with natural objects. Furthermore, education should cultivate children's innate curiosity by encouraging them to ask questions and seek answers independently. This approach aids in nurturing critical thinking and problem-solving abilities from an early age, laying a robust groundwork for future cognitive advancement. Teachers should also consider children's emotional and social progress by focusing on developing fundamental skills such as language, social interaction, and mental capabilities through enjoyable and meaningful tasks. Assessment methods should be formative, offering constructive feedback to support children's growth. Lastly, parental involvement and collaborative efforts between educators and families are essential for fostering comprehensive child development. Parents play a crucial role in enriching their children's vocabulary. For instance, creating a comfortable study environment can make learning, particularly vocabulary memorization, more enjoyable for students. Additionally, providing English or bilingual books, sharing stories, and watching movies can significantly enhance their vocabulary mastery. Since parents spend more time with their

children than teachers do, they are encouraged to actively participate in their children's learning process by teaching and supporting them during study time at home (Hartadi et al., 2020).

Teaching early childhood presents a range of unique and complex challenges. According to Jean Piaget (1952), a prominent psychologist in child development, one of the significant challenges lies in understanding the cognitive developmental stages of children. Children are in the preoperational stage at a young age, characterized by concrete and selfish thinking. This requires teachers to use highly visual and interactive methods and to be patient as children gradually learn to understand others' perspectives. Piaget also highlighted the importance of learning through play, which demands that teachers create environments rich in stimulation and opportunities for exploration. Another challenge is maintaining children's attention and motivation, given their short attention spans and need for varied activities. Consequently, early childhood educators must continuously innovate their methods to meet children's developmental needs effectively. Additionally, involving parents in supporting learning at home can be challenging due to their time constraints and understanding of early childhood education.

The learning strategy in early childhood should prioritize activities that include play, singing, and hands-on work. These three elements are fundamental in early childhood education, as they engage the brain, enhance intelligence, and develop emotional and physical skills in a joyful and unburdened manner. Implementing the learning process in early childhood education institutions requires active and engaging strategies. Activities such as playing, dancing, sports, and hand-eye coordination exercises should be integrated into the curriculum. Active learning emphasizes student engagement through practical experience and hands-on activities, stimulating thinking, emotions, and skill development. Educators act as facilitators in this approach, creating a democratic learning environment where students are both participants and contributors in active and creative learning. Attractive learning, which is interesting, exciting, varied, and creatively engaging, is essential in early childhood education, as young children tend to lose interest quickly. Their mood influences their activities, and they are drawn to beautiful, colourful, and stimulating things in their imagination.

Method

The research design used descriptive qualitative, aimed at describing the phenomenon of English language learning in early childhood environments in depth. This study focused on observing and understanding the existing learning practices without manipulating variables or the learning environment. The data sources in this study consisted of early childhood English teachers (ages 6 -7). Data were collected through several techniques, such as observation and questionnaires. Participatory and non-participatory observations were conducted in the classroom to see how teachers taught and how children responded to the learning process. Data were collected using an online questionnaire via Google Forms from three early childhood teachers in TK Among Putra II. Teachers were chosen as samples because they were the leading figures teaching English to early childhood. Subjects were selected using simple random sampling techniques. This study used observation sheets to record direct classroom observations, and the questionnaire had three main questions. These questions included obstacles in teaching English to early childhood, when those obstacles arose, and what solutions were used to overcome those obstacles. The questionnaires were collected by processing the raw data.

Findings and Discussions

Implementation of the teaching method by the teacher for early childhood English

Based on the research findings regarding teachers' views on teaching English to young children, the data showed that teachers considered English's importance in today's rapidly

evolving and digital era. Therefore, teachers believed that English proficiency would give children an advantage in facing future competition. The study also indicated that introducing English to young children is crucial, and the main objective of the research was to understand how teachers teach English to young children and the challenges faced in teaching English to this age group. The research explained that teachers implemented interactive methods

Song

For instance, songs with overly dominant music or with too much metaphorical language or slang were unsuitable for children. Choosing simple songs that suited learning needs (such as the curriculum) was better. Also, it was essential to select songs with explicit lyrics and correct pronunciation. Since students would use songs as models, they needed to find the best ones. If the teacher was going to sing, it was also necessary to ensure that the teacher provided a good model for the students. Teachers used songs to sing together about number recognition in English, from one to ten, and greetings. Songs stimulated children's imagination by introducing themes and stories (Gardner, H., 1983).

According to early childhood language learning theory, diverse and interactive methods are crucial to capturing children's attention and making learning more enjoyable (Pinter, 2017). Songs, for example, were an effective tool for teaching language because children tended to learn better through engaging rhythms and melodies (Paquette & Rieg, 2008). Learning through songs made it easier for children to memorize, and songs were an innovative way of teaching for preschool-aged children. Songs are not something frightening or threatening for students. Songs can help increase students' self-confidence. As proof that they have mastered something in English, students could proudly sing English songs in front of their parents (Brewster, 2002).

Drawing

Based on the observation, the teacher gave the students the task with an approach involving several creative and educational stages. First, students are asked to draw their fingers by tracing their hands on paper. After finishing the drawing, they are directed to colour the picture using crayons, allowing students to express their creativity in colour selection. The next step involves the numerical aspect, where students are asked to write numbers from 1 to 10 on top of each of the fingers they have drawn and coloured.

As the final stage of this task, the teacher instructs students to write the title "My fingers" on the top right corner of the paper. This integrated learning approach combines fine motor development through drawing and colouring, cognitive aspects through number recognition and sequence concepts, language skills through title writing, and artistic expression through colouring. This task helps students get to know themselves and their body parts better and integrates learning basic math concepts and writing skills in one engaging and interactive activity.

Games

Games were an effective strategy because they could increase student engagement and make them more active in learning (Cameron, 2001). In the game, the teacher introduced colours in English by forming two groups: ten boys and ten girls in a line. Each student took a plate, one per person, to be filled with a small coloured ball provided by the teacher. The teacher then instructed the colour "yellow," and the student at the back of the line had to retrieve the yellow ball, pass it to the student in front of them, and ensure it did not fall to the ground until the ball reached the front of the line and was placed in a basket. The game could increase intrinsic motivation by providing an appropriate challenge and immediate feedback, making students more engaged and motivated (Deci, E.L. & Ryan, R.M., 1985). The game also allowed students to learn through observation and imitation and could strengthen social and emotional skills (Bandura, A., 1977).

Challenges faced by teachers in teaching English to young children

These findings were based on a questionnaire from the teachers at TK Among Putra II. The teacher reported that teaching English to young children often faced various challenges. These issues became essential topics to discuss further in the following section. One main challenge was limited vocabulary and difficulty managing the classroom and capturing students' attention. This aligns with the Classroom Management theory, which states that effective classroom management is critical to creating a conducive learning environment (Marzano, 2003). The strategy employed by the teacher was using attractive methods such as Jigsaw, which involved all students in the learning process and could enhance their engagement and attention (Aronson, 2002).

A jigsaw puzzle involves assembling pieces of images into a complete whole. In the context of learning, the Jigsaw method adopted this concept by breaking down the lesson material into smaller parts, which small groups of students studied. Each student then combined their knowledge with group members to form a comprehensive understanding of the material. Thus, the goal was to enhance collaboration and understanding through group-based learning. Holding and assembling puzzle pieces also helped improve fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination (Gesell, 1940). To address the difficulty of maintaining students' concentration and motivation in learning, teachers also used strategies such as providing constructive feedback and positive reinforcement, effectively sustaining students' attention and motivation. According to behaviourism theory, positive reinforcement can increase the frequency of desired behaviours (Skinner, 1953). Implementing constructive feedback and positive reinforcement involved providing students with specific, clear guidance on what they did well and where they could improve. For instance, the teacher would commend students' pronunciation while encouraging them to focus on specific sounds, like the letter 'r.' This method served to motivate students and foster a positive learning environment. In contrast, simply pointing out a mistake without constructive feedback could have discouraged the students and made them hesitant to try again. The teacher used positive reinforcement by offering verbal praise, such as "Excellent job!" and physical rewards, like stars, to reinforce and encourage positive behaviour.

Another strategy for students who had difficulty concentrating was for the teacher to implement attractive ice-breaking activities during lessons. The goal was to create a comfortable learning environment and provide a positive experience to enhance student motivation (John Marshall Reeve, 2018). Various ice-breaking activities included singing, clapping, and other interactive movements. These ice-breakers helped students to refocus and concentrate on the material being taught. Such challenges often arose when students began to feel bored and tired during lesson time.

Another challenge faced by teachers when teaching English to young children was the limited vocabulary of the children. This limitation occurred because children were not yet accustomed to speaking in English, making introducing new vocabulary difficult for early learners. The strategy that the teachers needed to implement was to start with simple and common words, such as apple, cat, milk, banana, orange, etc. Teachers could use pictures and natural objects when introducing these words and then repeat the words in various contexts, such as "This is a grape. The grape is purple." (Catherine Snow, 1998). Snow combined various theoretical perspectives to discuss how children develop vocabulary. She highlighted that children's vocabulary developed through various language experiences, including adult interactions. For example, if a teacher greeted someone with "Good morning," students could imitate the teacher by saying "Good morning" as well.

Reading books was another method the teacher could implement, such as reading English storybooks to students, helping them become familiar with vocabulary frequently used by the teacher and other language activities. Snow also emphasized that effective vocabulary teaching involved repetition and rich context, assisting children to understand and remember new words. Teachers needed to repeat the words taught to students so that they would remember

and apply them in daily life. Another strategy was to post pictures on the classroom walls. Teachers placed materials related to fruits, vegetables, animals, etc. By using these visual aids, students found it easier to learn. These media helped children understand new vocabulary better by providing clear visual context (Harmer, 2001). This challenge became evident when students were given questions but still seemed confused about how to answer them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, teaching English in early childhood requires creativity and an approach from the teacher. The barriers include difficulty managing the class, lack of student concentration and limited vocabulary. Despite these difficulties, the teacher should commit to creating an inclusive and engaging learning atmosphere that can result in vocabulary acquisition and manage the class appropriately. Through attractive and innovative approaches, teachers can overcome the challenges of teaching English in early childhood and positively impact students' abilities and overall academic growth.

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