



Building Multilingual Children in Early Childhood (A Strategy to Improve Multilingual Ability for Children: The Sketch of Semiotic Study)

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Abstract

This paper aims to know the strategies to build children multilingual ability (English language, Bahasa Indonesia, and Javanese language). The researcher used descriptive qualitative research design simultaneously approached with semiotic study. The data are collected through observation and interview to the teachers of PAUD Plus Az-Zalfa. The result showed that the strategies to improve children multilingual ability were implemented into three basic steps: the language level, the communication relation and the workday used. Those steps cover the language level in sentence structure. Words were introduced to preschool and playgroup students, phrases and sentences were introduced to playgroup, K1 and K2 students. The implementations of those strategies were through daily routines and activities. It was included in main activities and supported activities. Main activities covered the thematic activities, including telling story, cooking, drawing, coloring, etc. The supported activities covered playing games and singing. The teachers used multilingual languages in dialogues among students-students, teachers-students, teachers-school principal and employees, and teachers-parents. The implementation of speaking multilingual languages was also divided in workday language. Mixed English and Bahasa Indonesia were used on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. The Javanese language was used on Thursday. In conclusion, the implementation of those above strategies can build children multilingual ability. English language was important for international communication and Javanese language was important to preserve the local content and students' mother tongue.

Keywords: multilingual ability, teaching strategies, multilingual children, playgroup students

1. INTRODUCTION

English is the most popular language in the world. It exists in international conferences and events. Besides, it is also "the bridge" in international communication when the speakers and hearers are coming from different languages. Since the speaker cannot understand the listeners' language or vice versa, they use English as the medium of communication.

Asean Economic Community is the community that focus on economic integration and development based on ASEAN countries. It makes ASEAN as a single market and production base. It is a competitive region with fair economic development and fully integrated movement into the global economy system. In the current issues, it will be characterized by free movement of goods, services, investments, capital and people skills. Therefore, this community gives exposure to the citizens among those countries to master English language skill well.

In Indonesia, English language is admitted as the foreign language. In foreign language learning, language plays no major role in the community and it is primarily learned in the classroom. It is not used in daily communication among people. However, the government of Indonesia issued the policy about the English language teaching in Indonesia that starting on junior high school students. The government eliminates English language in Elementary School's curriculum. This is followed by the public schools in Indonesia. This policy arises pros and contras among the citizens of Indonesia, even the studens and teachers. The contras explain the importance of critical period in learning language.

Lenneberg (1967:116) suggests that there was a neurologically based "critical period", which completes mastery of language, but it is no longer possible, because it will end around the onset of puberty". Lenneberg also suggests that bilingual language acquisition can only happen during the critical period (age two to puberty). It means that there is a biologically determined period of life when language can be acquired more easily. It is started from the golden period of children until puberty. The rest will be conscious language learning.

Beyond this period, a language is more difficult to be acquired by the children [1] and Lightbown and Spada suggest that "childhood is the golden age for creating simultaneous bilingual children due to the plasticity and virginity of the child's brain to make for superior ability specifically in acquiring the early sets or units of language [1]. It completes the previous theory about the importance of critical period in learning language.

The above theory points out that learning language is important started at early childhood after the students completing and mastering their first language or their mother tongue. It can be seen clearly in the aspect of

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pronunciation. The children who learn and acquire their second language and foreign language in the early age, they will have excellent pronunciation skill.

Focusing on learning foreign language, especially English in Indonesia, the teachers have to decide some strategies to reach the best output. Since the subjects learning are children in the preschool aged, the strategies should be interesting and attractive. Since the students have the ability of their first language acquisition, they just need to acquire their English in their daily communication. Therefore, the behaviorist perspective is admitted as the basic knowledge in deciding the strategies for teaching English in the early pre-school students.

Behaviorism points out the role of environmental factors in influencing behavior of the learners. It is supported by Skinner's theory. Skinner[2] wrote the concepts of operant conditioning and shaping. Learning is explained in terms of imitation, practice, reinforcement, and habit formation.

For this research the semiotic approach is used to explore the phenomenon of the subsurface. Semiotics is part of the linguistic study [3]. However, this independent linguistic study has now been contextualized to solve or reveal the phenomenon in the real world problem. For this context, it fits the need of the researcher to reveal the teaching and learning process and strategies by viewing at the discourse in the context which can be both stated using writing code or symbolized using picture and other objects. Hence, branches of the linguistics study can be actually tracked or studied using semiotics. Semiotics becomes the interesting issues to be integrated with other fields as what so-called macro-linguistics study. In further development, socio-semiotics has been a visual socio-semiotics that is a new field of study. It has been defined by Jewitt and Oyama as involving "the description of semiotic resources, what can be said and done with images (and other visual means of communication) and how the things people say and do with images can be interpreted[4]

2. METHOD

This research is about the identification of teachers' strategies in building multilingual children in early childhood through daily routines. Therefore, the researchers used descriptive qualitative research design. The researcher did the research in TK Az-Zalfa, Pacitan Subdistrict, East Java in academic year 2015-2016. The researcher collected the data by doing observation and conducting interview with the teachers and the principal. In this research, the researcher played an important role as the main research instrument. The researcher acted as a planner, data collector, analyst and the reporter of the findings. Finally, after having been collected, the data are analyzed by using the following process: data reduction, data display and drawing conclusion.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

PAUD Plus Az-Zalfa is one of popular PAUD schools in Pacitan. This school provides three level in children education. They are day care class or *Taman Penitipan Anak*, Playgroup class, Kindergarten class (K1 and K2). Besides, there is a class for children with special needs. Those levels are divided into several classes. The day care class is named by cute panda class. The playgroup level is named by nice seaworld class. K1 level is divided into sweet camel class, polite penguin class, and smart ant class. K2 level is divided into strong lion class, fascinating flamingo class, and workhard bee class. Each classes consist of 12-17 students. Each class in K1 and K2 level is taught by two teachers, playgroup class is taught by three teachers, and day care class is managed by four teachers.

This school integrates three education pillars: religious, knowledge and leadership. Therefore, the school curriculum is not only focusing on reaching the academic goal as implemented by the ministry of Education, but also develop non-academic curriculum that is integrated in natural and local bases. The school is also invites the parents' role in communicating with teachers and school stake holder in educating the students. The parents also work together in the activities related to teaching and learning process.

The teaching and learning process is administered by many activities in indoor activities and outdoor activities. The teaching and learning process is also managed by the theme. The theme is divided into weekly theme and monthly theme. There are also weekly events, monthly events, and yearly events. "Pasaran" is the example of weekly events. "Pasaran" means the students have to sell foods, drinks, snacks, or even handycraft for the other students or the parents. "Pasaran" is based on *dino pasaran* in the Javanese calendar. Another weekly events is "tabungan surga" on Friday. Those events complete the teaching and learning process. Those events also build the students characters.

In addition, the school also implements monthly events, like swimming, cooking, outing, father-mother clothes adventure. Each class has schedule for swimming. Cooking time is managed based on the theme. Each level of the class will have different day-schedule. Outing is also based on the theme. In the outing activities, the students visit the traditional market, farming fields, book fair, bus-station, etc. In father-mother clothes adventure, the students are joined the adventure by wearing their parents clothes.

The yearly events are AFO (Az- Zalfa Family Olympic), Mothers' Day, Kartini's Day, Pesantren Kilat, Parenting, Carnival, Camping, Idul Adha, etc.



Picture 1: The students joining the farmers in the farm (outing activity)

The school curriculum implements multilingual in daily communication. Bahasa Indonesia, English language and Javanese Language are used in daily interaction. English language is aimed as a strategy to face international events and communities, while Javanese Language is aimed to prevent mother tongue and local content. Actually, the students are also introduced to Arabic Language on Friday, but it is not implemented in daily communication yet.

Those three languages are introduced simultaneously in their daily communication. It can be seen from the supported conditions in the schools. The students learn through daily routines. therefore, they feel enjoy in learning English because it is not taught inside the classroom (as usually seen in teaching English for the general public school curriculum) where the students just learn from text book without applying in daily communication.

The implementation of teachers' strategy in building multilingual ability for preschool and kindergarten students in PAUD Plus Az-Zalfa through daily routines and activities are divided into three aspects below:

3.1 Language Level

The teachers start implementing multilingual in daily communication by using different language level based on the class level. The word are introduced in nursery class and playgroup class and phrases and sentences are introduced in K1 and K2 students. The teachers introduce those words based on the weekly theme. Enriching vocabularies for the students are the basic goal in teaching learning process. Then, in the next step, the students can use it in communication. Here is the example:



Picture 2: a note for placing bag (sticked on the bag locker)

The above picture is the example of a note for placing bag of day care class. This kind of note is also placed in each classes from each class level. Besides, there are also note for shoes, sandals, found thing, and rubbish. It is the example of introducing English in the word level. It is not only in written word because many of them still cannot read. However, the teacher also introduces it in everyday vocabularies. For example, the teacher tell the students to put shoes in the locker by saying mixed Bahasa Indonesia and English Language by saying: "*Kak Noah, tolong shoesnya diletakkan disana ya!*" while pointing to the shoes locker. This condition is spoken everyday. Then, it will be continued by more complex expression to phrases or sentences based on the students class level.



Picture 3: The media for telling the date, day, month and year.

In every single day, the teacher introduced the days name, date, month and year in English language. It makes the students can memorize unconsciously. It is effective for them without drilling consciously. A month later, the students can speak it without guidance from the teachers.



Picture 4: Polite Penguin class rules

The above example is the class rules example hung on the wall. This written rules is completed with picture illustration. It helps the students in understanding the rules. In explaining these rules, the teacher speak it in English language with illustration. Therefore, the students understand it naturally without translating into Bahasa Indonesia. It is effective for them in learning English unconsciously.

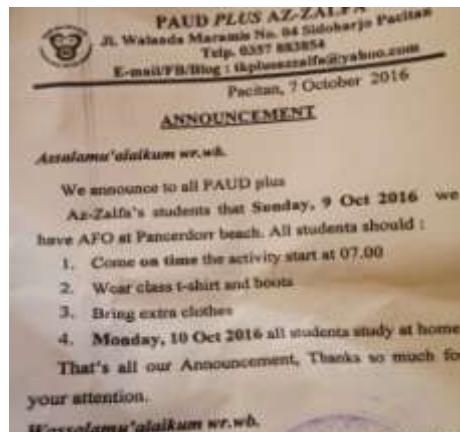
As mentioned previously by the Skinner theory, the teaching learning process covers the imitation, practice, reinforcement, and habit formation. Viewed in this context, in the imitation process, the teachers give the example in expressing question and giving instruction. Besides, they also implement multilingual in school communication. In practice activity, the teachers use English in daily interaction together with the students. The teachers will also correct the mistakes done by the students. The students sometimes mispronounce the words. Then, the teachers exactly give correction to the students.

Reinforcement points out in giving positive and negative reinforcement to the students. In the teaching process, the teacher should avoid giving negative reinforcement because giving positive reinforcement can change students' behavior while negative reinforcement just changes the actions.

The reinforcement is implemented in the classroom activity to motivate the students. As the example, the teachers can give the first turn in taking the snack (in snack time) for those who can mention the vocabularies related to chicken (in weekly theme material: chicken). Habit formation is implemented in using English language regularly and consistently in daily routines. Day by day, they will have rich vocabularies as a formula to speak English fluently in the next level.

3.2 Communication Relation

Those three languages are used in daily communication in the school. It also focuses on the communication relation among the teachers, the principal, the students and even to the parents. In the beginning of an academic year, the parents will be announced to support the successful of applying three languages. Here is the example:



Picture 4: The Announcement for the parents.

The above picture is the announcement for the parents about the students activities. the announcement is always written in English language. In the beginning, some parents feel difficult. However, it will make them familiar to English language. Besides, the parents are also speaking English in school area, or at least they mix or switch with Bahasa Indonesia. It makes the parents learn English too at home because the students mostly bring the language at school into their communication at home.

This situation support the students to speak English as a habit. In the school, the teachers speak English to the other teachers. The students call the teachers as Miss, Mr, or Mrs. It is not only for the teachers but also for the gardeners, chefs or the IT Staff. In addition, at home the parents try to practice English eventhough it is in the word level. It supports the students to be familiar with English language. They speak and understand English language unconsciously in their daily activities.

3.3 Workday Used

Those three languages are used based on the used days. The students, teachers, principal, and parents (especially if they are in school area) will communicate by using English Language on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. The Javanese language is used on Thursday.

The implementation of the day schedule in speaking language is followed by the students, the teachers, and the staff members of the school. It is started with the teachers when they greet the parents in the morning. The teachers will greet the parents in the morning by speaking Javanese Language on Thursday.

On Thursday, the students also wear Batik or Lurik dress. It is a symbol of Javanese costum.



Picture 5: The students wearing traditional Javanese clothes.

This activity support them to speak Javanese. They will remember that they have to speak Javanese when they wear Batik or Lurik in their daily activities. The application of speaking Javanese language is also implemented on written and spoken. It is also implemented on games or other activities.

4. CONCLUSION

The strategies to build children multilingual ability were implemented into three basic steps: the language level, the communication relation and the workday used. Words were introduced to preschool and playgroup students, phrases and sentences were introduced to playgroup, K1 and K2 students. The teachers used multilingual languages in dialogues among students-students, teachers-students, teachers-school principal and employees, and teachers-parents. The implementation of speaking multilingual languages was also divided in workday language. Mixed English and Bahasa Indonesia were used on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. The Javanese language was used on Thursday.

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