

Dewi, I., & Indarsih, W. (2019). Building Child-Friendly Education: Applying Appropriate Strategy to English Young Learners . *Indigenous: Jurnal Ilmiah Psikologi*, 4(1). 10-17. doi: <http://doi.org/10.23917/indigenous.v4i1.6055>

Building Child-Friendly Education: Applying Appropriate Strategy to English Young Learners

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Abstraction *The aim of the study is to investigate what strategies are appropriate and meaningful for young learners of English. The method used is qualitative descriptive. The data collection used for qualitative description are a semi-structured interview, observation, and analysis on lesson plans. The participants were an English teacher and 68 first graders. The findings showed that applying instruction-based strategy in the target language in which the learners responded by whole-body actions (physical actions) made young learners fun, dance with delight, act with joy, and finish off with big smiles. This strategy also encouraged young learners to learn English, especially that for vocabulary. The right-brain tool strategy made 41 young learners out of 68 or 60.29% participants were deeply engaged to class activity. It means the learners take full ownership of learning activity, show high levels of energy, and express a willingness to take part in activity. The strategy was effective and impressive that made young learners involved in meaningful activities which required repetition. In addition, the strategy could be applied to any class size. Furthermore, on the part of the teacher did not need to prepare a great deal or exceedingly.*

Keywords: *young learners, vocabulary, instruction-based strategy, practical*

INTRODUCTION

The significance of English proficiency has been growing in the trend of globalization. Learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) particularly in Indonesia has gained popularity from year to year. The EFL learners increase from year to year. According to the latest research from the British Council, as of 2014 there are about one and a half billion people learning English worldwide now. As a foreign language, English is one of the most favorable language to be learned. In addition to that, English has been given in any education levels in Indonesia either in formal or informal settings.

English teachers strive to help learners to promote EFL learning. EFL teachers use various strategies to aid young learners maintain and expand their language skills (Cheatham, et

al., 2010). Recent studies have shown that the quality of instruction played an important role in educating English learners (Calderon, et al., 2011). Schulz (2009) claimed that teachers who gave appropriate instructions that meet the need of the learners with different points would provide effective learning environment.

There is a tendency that English is introduced since an early age in pre-schools such as in Play Groups or Kindergartens. One question is aroused as a response that there is a trend of introducing English since early level especially in big cities. "Is it necessary to teach English as a foreign language for young learners?"

Mulia (2015) contends the benefit of introducing English as a foreign language for children. Their verbal-linguistic intelligence will improve. Freudenstein (1979); Speaker, Taylor,

and Kamen (2010) claim the importance of learning English at an early age. Children who start learning foreign language will have better logical thinking and greater mental flexibility. He also proposed that children who are multilingual have wider cultural perspectives compared to those who have monolingual competence.

The status of English as the first foreign language is regarded essential to be given in both formal and informal education in Indonesia. It is in alignment with the development of science, technology, and arts. This major step is aimed to create a critical mass in the area of education in Indonesia.

Basically, teaching English as a foreign language to young learners is supposed to be interesting and enjoyable. Bear in mind when young learners are exposed to merely the foreign language, they will be bored and frustrated when they are not engaged in activities. According to the recent language learning theory, there is a belief that young learners acquire information when they are encouraged to learn and achieve the best through exploration and experiment. The positive impact of getting first learning experience which is fun will bring good influence on the next level of education. One influential factor that needs to be taken into consideration is that the learning process for young learners should rely on Developmentally Appropriate Practice (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009: 9). The main point is that the appropriate learning instruction in the early level is more likely influence the next learning process.

Many researchers believe that vocabulary acquisition is the basis for language mastery for learners. Vocabulary mastery is a foundation to acquire any language whether it is a first, second, or foreign language. Therefore, acquiring vocabulary is not only important but also crucial in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. However young learners may regard English is complicated because learning English is a complex subject. When young learners are learning vocabulary in an EFL context, they need to learn at least three aspects

at once, namely the meaning of the words, the spelling and pronunciation of the words.

The English learning process for young learners in a foreign context is ideally relaxing and fun. The very basic materials to be presented for young learners should be designed creatively that will make them move around. Providing encouragement and positive feedback are a-must-to do list for teachers of young learners in order to establish a stress-free and safe environment. By doing so, young learners will be more likely to enjoy learning. Generally young learners are very enthusiastic with songs, active games, and other simple activities (Tavil & Söylemez, 2008; Tavil & Isisag, 2009; Calderon, et.al, 2011; Inbar-Louirie, 2010).

One example of good practice to apply in teaching English from young learners to twelfth grades is giving qualified instruction strategy (Calderon, et al., 2011). The strategy is in line with the concept of learning by doing. Coyne, et.al. (2009) contended that instruction-based strategy was useful in bringing up the meaning of new vocabulary. Furthermore, Hwang, et.al. (2014) claimed that a kinesthetic English learning system (KELS) which was a learning strategy based on a Total Physical Response method was effective across perceptual learning styles. This strategy was effective to facilitate students in learning to listen and speak in English. However, Schulz (2009) stated that what matters the most in the teaching learning process of English was the quality of instruction.

Young learners who learn English as a new subject may regard it "strange" or difficult to perceive. Therefore, they may find difficulties in absorbing unfamiliar matter to be taken care especially that for vocabulary. Consequently, their motivation to learn English is more likely to be low.

Motivation plays an important role that may be the secret to successful language learning (Lamb, 2011; Sougari&Hovhannisyanyan, 2013; Sun, et.al, 2016; Popescu, Daniea, 2016). Getting learners to engage in learning activities is influential in determining how much substance the learners will absorb. Learners who

are motivated and engaged in learning tend to perform considerably satisfying academic records and good behavior. Engaging learners in any activities should start with the pre-analysis encompassing what the learners already know, design activity that encourage learners' interest and commitment to the topic and use various modes of strategy (Popescu, 2016).

However, motivating learners is not as simple as teachers thinking of. It is one of major challenges teachers usually face on a daily basis. The recent empirical research which studies on learners' autonomy believe that motivation plays important role for fostering autonomy (Popescu, 2016) which currently becoming trend in second language acquisition research. To motivate learners in learning the teacher should show her/his enthusiasm in teaching. There is a belief that enthusiasm is contagious. When the teacher shows positive attitude, consequently it will spread from him/her to another. In short, the teacher is such a role model for his/her students. Motivation may give a big difference on reaching the instructional objectives. As we are all familiar with, there are two kinds of motivation, namely extrinsic and intrinsic. The teacher can give a gift, praise, or test to encourage young learners. However, young learners who have an inherent desire to learn may have an ability to control themselves in learning.

The area of concern or condition to be high-lighted based on description above are: young learners may regard English as a strange substance as it is a new course; young learners find the subject is challenging to grasp it for the first time, especially the vocabulary mastery; children's motivation may be flat consequently it may influence children's ability to master vocabulary; giving instruction-based strategy in the target language is assumed to be a good one to be implemented for English teaching for young learners.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants of this study were 68 first grade pupils and an English teacher at one of private

primary schools in Sleman Regency, Yogyakarta Indonesia. The pupils were chosen from two first grade classes at this school enrolled in 2017-2018 academic year. The selection of the participants used simple random sampling which meant each pupil had an equal chance of being selected.

The foreign language classes were pupils with mixed-competence. It meant that there was no classification which class had superior students while the other had inferior ones. The age of the pupils were 6 to 7 years old which were mixed in gender at beginning levels with limited set of words; therefore, they were not able to communicate effectively or express ideas in the target language both oral and written form.

This study was intended to investigate what appropriate strategies the teacher used that meet the learners' need in learning English. Some young learners were interviewed to speak up their mind what their responses toward the English learning especially what strategies the teacher usually used. The English teacher was also being interviewed to evaluate how the learners' response toward the designed activities. The purpose was to explore what strategies the teacher usually applied. Which strategies the young learners enjoy the most. What strategies the teacher applied that may help learners feel personally connected to their learning. She was conferred what strategy that fit the students' need and learning strategy. The teacher's lesson plan was also reviewed to see if the teacher applied the strategy which was assumed to be one of the best strategies the learners love the most.

The method used in the research was qualitative descriptive. The data collection used for qualitative description were a semi-structured interview, observation, and analysis on lesson plans. The method is a strategy to provide a rich picture of phenomenon being investigated. The purpose of choosing an integrated multi-method was based on the logical reason that there is no best single method. One single data collection method is insufficient to provide accurate and adequate research findings.

The participant was the English teacher of young learners. She was interviewed to explore what strategies that the teacher usually applied and which strategies that meet the young learners' need as well as they enjoy the most. What strategies the teacher applied that may help learners feel personally connected to their learning.

The pupils were interviewed to know their attitudes toward the teacher's teaching strategy and their motivation in learning English as a foreign language. The semi-structured interview is designed with adjustments of the language level of the pupils. Besides, the questions were not always asked based on order. The researcher sometimes helped the pupils by giving clues in answering questions. In addition, the participants were asked for clarifications when needed. The main reason the researcher chose the participants was that they were the first English receivers in a formal education.

TI did some observations about pupils' interest toward learning English. There were 68 pupils in total consisting of 34 first graders in each class. I also observed what strategies the teacher did to make the class alive.

The lesson plan analysis was checked into thoroughly to find out whether the teacher applied her favorable strategy that meet the learners' need and learning styles. The second was to find out how the teacher designed the lesson.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data consisted of interview which was recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English. The data was analyzed consisting of 6 questions. Before collecting data, the researcher got consent from the administrator and the teacher. In addition, the students and the teacher were informed that their participation in this study was voluntary. The observation was conducted at two first year of primary school, namely, the class A, and the class B. The lesson plan was analyzed on how the teacher designed the activities using strategies that address most the young learners' learning style.

Interview

As for the qualitative interview data, the researcher asked the English teacher some questions regarding the strategy the teacher commonly used. The interview was done in two modes, via online chat as an initial interview and direct interview. She replied that she used a wide variety of strategies such as songs, games, drilling, simple grammar, instruction-based strategy, and phonetic strategy. She explained further that most pupils loved games, songs, and instruction-based strategy. In addition, when the pupils were given instruction-based activities which engaged whole-body actions (physical actions); consequently, the activities made young learners fun, dance with delight, act with joy, and finish off with big smiles.

The teacher claimed that typical learning style of most first graders at 2017/2018 academic year is kinesthetic and tactile. According to the research conducted by the teacher, the breakdown of learning styles of the two first graders varies, i.e. 46% kinesthetic learners, 20% visual learners, 20% auditory, and with the remaining 14% consisting of learners with verbal learning style. Most learners are very enthusiastic when they are engaged by body movement and hands-on work.

To accommodate the kinesthetic learners, the teachers designed the class activities which incorporating body motions to address the learners' needs. She said that her students like doing process what they were learning by letting them actually do the work or task rather than listen to how it was done. Subsequently, she contended that instruction-based strategy was her best-practice strategy to apply at her two first graders. However, she said the strategy was only effective when it was applied within 15 to 20 minutes only. She also combined with other strategy to keep the class interesting by incorporating audio-visual material in her session such as bringing cartoon movies or exercise songs to help learners' imagination thrive and grow.

Further, the teacher claimed that instruction-based strategy was appropriate to apply at her first grader classes. This strategy was

an effective right-brain tool of foreign language instruction. The learners were engaged with meaningful activities which required repetition to keep the vocabulary in learners' long term memory. In addition, she said the strategy may be applied in any class size.

The other participant to be randomly interviewed was four young learners out of 68 learners in total. The young learners were the first grade of primary school. The language used for the interview was Indonesian and conducted in person. Then the interview was recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English to be analyzed.

There are interesting things about their purposes of learning English. One out of four interviewees responded that one day he wanted to go English speaking countries and be able to communicate with English native speakers effectively.

Two other learners replied that they wanted to get good mark and the remaining one did not respond. She did not have any idea to speak up her mind. The excerpts of the interview (student A is male and aged 7, B is female and aged 7, C is female aged 6, and D is female aged 6):

"My mum has been in Singapore since last Friday (with smiling face). I want to go there. She is going home this evening by plane... and I'll pick her with my dad at eehm... the airport. My mum said If I am good at English, I will be able to go to many countries. Yeah... It's nice to talk to people there (English native speakers). It's cool, you know... haha." (Participant A)

"Well, I like English so I'm happy when I get good marks." (Participant B)

"I do, too. I like English because I like it. I don't know why. I'm just happy when I get good points on my English test." (Participant C)

The learners were motivated for some reasons. The first participant seemed intrinsically motivated as he was always happy to get an English class although he did not get the results he expected. Say, he did not get high point or mark in an English test. The others were extrinsically motivated. They said that the

teacher would give a prize for those who were active in the classroom. The teacher would also give compliment, nice words or even a bonus point. The other said because the teacher is funny, patient, understanding, and a cheerful looking teacher.

"My English marks are not always excellent but I don't care. I am just happy to learn it. Because ehmm because one day I dream to go abroad like my mum." (Participant A)

"English is my favorite subject because of my teacher. She's funny. I love her." (Participant B)

"My English teacher is a cheerful looking woman, patient, and understanding. She never gets angry. I love when she says nice words to me." (Participant C)

"I love when she gives me stamped stars on my book." (Participant B)

The young learners love different types of activities designed by the teacher. As a matter of fact, the teacher is such a creative one. She designed the activities in such a way that addresses the learners' need and learning styles. Herewith a number of activities the learner like the most.

"My favorite activity? Hmm...hmm... hmm...yeah, games! What game? Ahh... a game like "Simon says." (Participant A)

"I love watching cartoon movie. For example eee...eee.. an animal cartoon." (Participant B)

"Me? Oh...hmmm... hmm... I like the alphabet cards." (Participant C) (Learners were instructed to raise his/her card when the teacher spelled the intended letter).

"I love any activities in which I get a prize. Once I got a pencil!" (Participant D)

When the question is whether they like learning English. Three out four learners stated that they love English; meanwhile, the other quite like it.

Observation

The observation in two classes was conducted consecutively. All pupils came on time. The teacher began the class by giving a fun and simple game called "Simon says." The next session, the teacher delivered a written review. The second session was not a part of

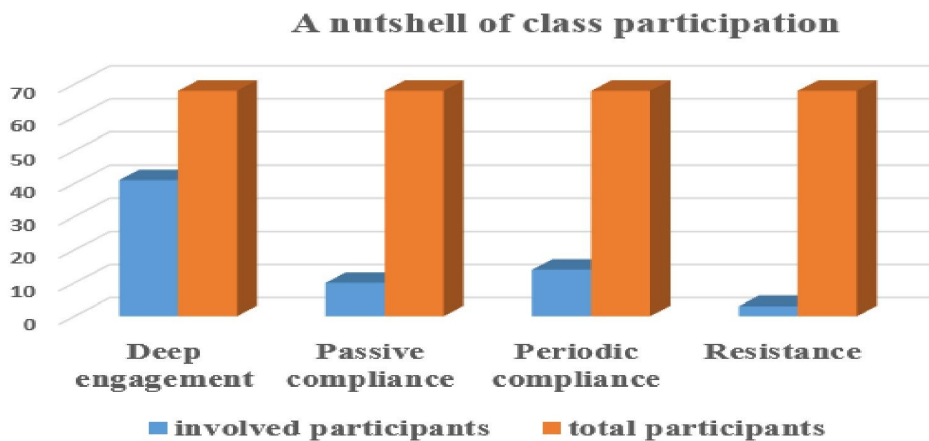


Figure 1. A nutshell of class participation

the observation. The “Simon says” game helped pupils to practice listening skills and vocabulary. The game is fairly easy in which the pupils will act or do what Simon instructs or commands.

The rule of the game is adapted to provide the zero stress zone in which there is no punishment. The teacher is as Simon. At first, the teacher informed a step-by-step rule. Then she gave examples to support her explanation. All pupils in the two classes were engaged in this activity. In a nutshell, the result of the observation is compiled into the following graph:

As already mentioned, the overall number of the participants was 68 (class A= 34 and class B =34). Statistical analysis was performed to

classify participants into four categories. The category for deep engagement was 41 (60.29%), passive compliance was 10 (14.71%), periodic compliance was 14 (20.59%), and resistance was 3 (4.41%).

Lesson Plan Analysis

The analysis purpose of the teacher’s lesson plan was scrutinizing what strategy that fitted and accommodated most learners’ need and learning style. The teacher contended that not all themes could be arranged using the strategy. The result of the lesson plan analysis was that the teacher delivered themes of colors, things in the classroom, pets, and cattle using instruction-based strategy (see Table 1).

Table 1. Lesson plan analysis

Theme	Strategies
Colors	Instruction-based strategy (IBS), demonstration, phonetic method
Things in the classroom	Simple grammar, drilling, IBS
Pets	Games, drilling, IBS, phonetic method
Cattle	IBS, song, phonetic method

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION`

take part in activity. Ten participants or 14.71% of total percentage is classified as passive compliance. Passive compliance implied that young learners follow the directions reasonably or in a routine manner, learners’ attention is mildly distracted, and learners need the teacher’s attention. Fourteen participants or 20.59% of total percentage is classified as periodic compliance. It entails that learners’ attention or

focus fluctuates, their focus is easily distracted, and learners need the teacher’s full attention. The last category was resistance. There are three learners or 4.41% are unwilling to participate in learning activity, they are passive learners. Consequently, the teacher may need to redesign the learning activity.

The teacher’s research study revealed that 46% learners’ learning style was kinesthetic. Therefore, the teacher should design her class

in such a way that fulfil most students' learning styles by choosing appropriate strategies that will make her pupils happy. She contended that her pupils would gain significant improvement when they were engaged in body movement activity and hands-on work. She argued that instruction-based strategy was appropriate to be applied in the first graders of the school. Further, she said any class size would work well with the strategy. The impressive thing was on the part of the teacher did not need to prepare exceedingly. However, she said the strategy was only effective when it was applied within 15 to 20 minutes only to prevent from boredom.

The results of the present study revealed that in general young learners' motivation to learn English especially that for vocabulary was absolutely positive. In addition, it became apparent that learners were encouraged both externally and internally. Young learners were extrinsically motivated by nice treatment of the teacher such as getting prizes, compliment, and extra points. In addition, the teacher's positive attitude influenced learners' interest in learning. The learners complied the teacher's nice characteristics i.e. funny, patient, understanding, and a cheerful looking teacher made them enjoy learning. One learner was intrinsically motivated for he had an obsession to be able to go to English speaking countries.

It was apparent that young learners were confident and relaxed as they were not afraid of trying even when they failed. They enjoyed the

EFL teachers of young learners is recommended to apply the strategy.

class because there was no pressure and anxiety. As we may believe that pressure and fear of failure inhibit the language learning. In conclusion, psychological factors play an important role in language learning.

The teacher used a wide variety of strategies, approaches, and methods such as songs, games, drilling, simple grammar, instruction-based strategy, and phonetic method. Nonetheless, the teacher's lesson plan showed that there were four themes that used instruction-based strategy (IBS) in the teaching learning activity. Based on the results of interview, observation, and the analysis on lesson plans, IBS is regarded as an appropriate delivery mode to meet the young learners' need, expectation, and the realities of the learning atmosphere and to maintain high standard competence.

Suggestion

1. It is an exceptional idea that the teacher keeps up with satisfactory effort to encourage her pupils. The way she motivates the young learners is perceivable and evident. The teacher's nice treatment and positive attitude significantly bring positive effect on learner's motivation.
2. Instruction-based strategy is one of the most terrific practice considering young learners' need and learning styles. The teacher is pretty favorable in designing activities in an EFL context, choosing the relevant strategy, and ability to motivate the learners. Furthermore, both ESL and

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