

## REQUIREMENTS OF TEACHING ENGLISH FOR YOUNG LEARNERS: AN OVERVIEW IN PADANG, WEST SUMATERA

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### Abstract

*People start communicating since they are babies. Language is a tool for communication. When a baby is born, the environment influences what language she/he will use later on. At the first time, the baby acquires his/her mother tongue. Later on she/he learns other languages. In Indonesia, especially in Padang, West Sumatra, children use Minang and Bahasa as their daily language. When the children enter early childhood education, English is also taught and introduced in kindergarten. Even though not all of the kindergartens in Padang put English as their subject, but most of the "famous kindergartens" include English as their additional curriculum. They "sell" English as one of their programs because they realize that many parents believe that English is an important thing in the current and future for their children. Basically, there are some requirements that need to be prepared in order to promote English as a holistic teaching and learning process. This article discusses about some essential requirements in teaching English to young learners such as, curriculum, teacher competency, media and method used, and more specifically talks about its overview in Padang, West Sumatra.*

**Keyword:** Requirement of TEYL, Young Learners, Padang Local Context

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Since English has become an international language, more and more people learn English. The importance of English as a world language has made people to learn as early as possible. Some psycholinguists say that one of the factors to be successful in language learning is young age. There are some explanations for better learning at young age. The brain is more adaptable before puberty than after, and that acquisition of languages is possible without self-consciousness at an early age and also because young children have more opportunities than adults, therefore teaching English for young learners becomes an important thing due to the chance that the children have.

Teaching English to young learners refers to a more specialized area of teaching English which deals with younger students. It is totally different from teaching adults. When teaching young learners we constantly have to keep in mind the fact that what we have in front of us is a mixed class with varied abilities, expectations, motivation level, knowledge and last but not least, different learning styles. 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 conditions 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 considered are the curriculum, teacher competency, media and method used.

In Indonesia, interest in teaching English to young learners has been steadily growing in recent years. Many parents believe that by studying English from an early stage, their children will get a better future. They believe that by introducing English to their children as early as possible, it will bring their children to have a better career. In Padang, West Sumatra, some kindergartens put English in their curriculum although in early childhood education new curriculum, for example the 2013 curriculum, do not include English as their attention, but every kindergarten has its own authority to expand their curriculum. Some kindergartens such as Planet Kids, Citra Al Madina, DEK, Mariana,

and more put English as one of their subject. This article is going to overview the requirement and its implication in some kindergartens in Padang, West Sumatera.

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **1. Young Learners**

The term young learner is interpreted differently around the world. Scott and Ytreberg (2001) distinguish between two groups of young learners, one between 5-7 and another 8-11, considering mainly their ability to perceive the abstract and concrete. This article would like to focus on about young learners who attending preschool and kindergarten age 4-7 . In Indonesia, children enter kindergarten since they are four or five years. They will finish their education at age 7 when they can enter primary school. Young learners at the transition level are outspoken. They also active and move around, therefore they interested in exploration. Ages 5–8 generally have the following characteristics. They are: keen and enthusiastic, curious and inquisitive and outspoken. They also active and move around, therefore they interested in exploration. By doing exploration, they learn the word. For them every single day is an adventure. To create activities in English teaching and learning, the teacher should consider the characteristics.

Current language learning theory follows the premise that children learn best through discovery and experimentation and being motivated to learn. Children tend to pick up language from other children relatively quickly because they want to play and make friends. Communication between them flows smoothly but effectively. They also pick up language from their daily environment and through the media if it catches their interest. Children's reasons for wanting to learn a new language can be varied and change with time. There are some advantages that young learners have over older ones. Young children are sensitive to the sounds and the rhythm of new languages and they enjoy copying new sounds and patterns of intonation. Their interest to new language is huge. In addition, younger learners are usually less anxious and less inhibited than older learners (Pinter, 2006)

Environment affects children very much. "Children help reconstruct their own intelligence through active exploration of their environment" (Krogh, 1994: 43). This explains the tendency of the learners to become active self-builders. Bearing this in mind, we can assume that the teacher needs to provide a stimulating environment and act as facilitator if s/he wants to give efficient lessons to young learners. Teacher plays important thing in constructing appropriate simulation. Similar to Locke, Vygotsky (cited in Cameron, 2001) says that children are actively exploring themselves. Their interest to a new thing brings them to exploration by their own. For them, everything in this world is so interesting. Learn new language is also interesting. Environment affects children very much.

### **2. Teaching English for Young Learners**

One main reason for teaching English to young learners is the convenience of their age for language acquisition. The belief that "younger is better" and children learn much more quickly and efficiently is generally appreciated by many especially by the supporters of Critical Period Hypothesis. Another reason for the popularity of teaching English to young learners is because it is a lingua franca today, which means a common language used for communication between two people whose languages are different (Harmer, 2007). Thus, parents want their children to learn English as early as possible so that they will be able to benefit from English as an important part of their academic and business career in the future. Seeing children with good ability in English give many benefit.

Teaching young learners is by no means the same as teaching adults. In teaching young language learners, Pinter (2006) points out a number of reasons why children can benefit from learning a foreign language. It can develop children's basic communication abilities in the language. Communication abilities need to stimulate as early as possible. Teaching English also encourages enjoyment and motivation for language learning especially when it is in fun way. In addition, children can also promote learning about other cultures and develop children's cognitive skills as well as develop children's metalinguistic awareness. Learn language means learn about culture.

Children are born with a natural appetite and interest for learning, and their desire to learn should be fueled when they begin school (Cameron, 2001). Teachers have the most important roles in creating an encouraging emotional atmosphere in the classroom. Different activities will support statement. Teachers have to be creative in order to make a fun and interesting atmosphere in their class. Cooperative rather than competitive atmosphere (especially including a winner and some physical reward) works better with young learners (Scott and Ytreberg, 2001). The students should feel that they are winning and having fun altogether. Yet this should not be understood as enjoying with little learning. The motto should be learning by enjoying. Children especially have fun with movement and physical participation, and the more fun the students have the better they will remember the language learned (Shin, 2006). As Scott and Ytreberg (2001) emphasize children understanding comes through hands and eyes and ears, and the physical world is dominant at all times.

### **3. Requirements in Teaching English for Young Learners**

#### **a. Curriculum**

The term curriculum refers to the lessons and academic content taught in a school or in a specific course or program. In dictionaries, curriculum is often defined as the courses offered by a school, but it is rarely used in such a general sense in schools. Depending on how broadly educators define or employ the term, curriculum typically refers to the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn. Curriculum of teaching English for young learner is absolutely different from teaching English for adult. English for young learner is not as complicated as adult, for example, children do not comprehend abstract ideas such as grammar. Bourke (2006: 280) notes that young learners don't have a concept of ideas such as parts of speech, discourse or phonology. Any attempt to explain these abstract concepts at an early age will likely serve only to confuse them. In addition, from an early age, children first begin to sort out words involving concrete objects. When introduced into the L2 classroom, they "need very concrete vocabulary that connects with objects they can handle or see" (Cameron 2001: 81). In contrast, adult learners are able to cope with abstract ideas. Therefore, teaching English for young learner have to avoid teaching grammar and focus on about vocabulary. Reading and writing is also suspended until appropriate age to introduce English literacy.

Curriculum related to learning material that will be given to children. Based on Early Childhood Education Curriculum in Indonesia, there is no specific competency that related to English. Early childhood education curriculum in Indonesia is focusing on religion and moral value, motoric, cognitive, social-emotional, and literacy. Literacy is stressing on Bahasa Indonesia. This phenomenon makes teaching English for young learner in Indonesia having difficulties in developing their learning material. However, some kindergarten compiles their own learning material in order to direct their teacher in teaching English for young learner. Kindergartens in Indonesia use thematic approach in their classes, therefore, they insert vocabulary based on the theme every week. Most of kindergarten in Padang are stressing on vocabulary such as; part of body, family, animals, fruits, number, etc. They also introduce simple classroom commands for instance; stand up, sit down open your books etc. They avoid reading and writing activity as well as grammar. In Adabiah Kindergarten, there is special day - that is Friday- where most of activity and communication use English. In conclusion, kindergartens in Padang have their own curriculum to support teaching English for young learner based on theme every week.

#### **b. Teacher Competency**

Educational research continually reminds us that the most important factor in any child's education is the teacher. Effective EYL programs have well-trained teachers with adequate proficiency in English to help their children learn English. Effective EYL teachers have appropriate training in teaching young learners, in teaching English, and in teaching through English. As it can be understood, teacher's role in this process is highly demanding. They should adapt their language, teaching techniques and methods, and the emotional, cognitive and physical atmosphere in the classroom according to the children's needs and readiness; otherwise, a successful learning cannot be achieved.

A teacher is someone who has an ability to understand the curriculum, syllabus, method, material, evaluation etc and is able to create joyful learning activities during the lesson. Besides,

teacher is required to have good skills in English which enables him/her to provide the most suitable learning materials for the learners. A teacher must have knowledge how to apply several methods and techniques to help students learn. But with the growing number of EYL programs, a major challenge is finding enough teachers or teacher training programs to prepare these teachers.

Vale and Feunteun (2012: 6) classifies typical points raised by the teachers of English to children, namely 1) teachers with EYL experience, but with no experience of working with children, 2) teachers with experience of teaching children, but with little or no experience of teaching EFL, and 3) teachers who are trained to teach EFL, possibly to children. EYL experience needs to meet with experience of teaching children in order to having good competency teacher. Teachers who are trained to teach English sometimes reluctant to teach in kindergarten, on the other hand teachers who are trained to teach children have limited ability and knowledge in teaching English.

In Indonesia, EYL teachers are classified into three types, namely: 1) classroom teachers who have not been to English teaching college, 2) English teachers who attend English teaching college but have no experience working with children, and 3) teachers who have English background and experience working with children (Suyanto 2009: 33). This statement relates with reality in Padang. In some kindergarten, teachers who introduce English, most of them, have no competency in teaching English. They do not have communicative competence in the foreign language, such as linguistic competence, and linguistic-cultural competence. Most of them have poor pronunciations that lead the children to wrong pronunciation as well. However, some kindergartens choose teacher who really have competency in English. The school recruits teachers who have been to English teaching college and train them how to work with children, such as in Citra al Madina Kindergarten. In addition, in Planet Kids Kindergarten, the teachers are specially trained to learn English, therefore they can teach English well. To sum up, teacher competency in teaching English for young learner need to be improved through training to meet an ideal teacher.

### **c. Media and Method**

An interesting media and appropriate method is needed in order to teaching English to young learner effectively. Children have their own characteristic. Their cognitive developments lay on concrete operational stage. In this stage, children begin to think logically and use their experience to solve problem. Nevertheless, they are only able to solve problem which are applied to concrete examples and objects in real life (Pinter, 2011, p. 12). . Media used in the teaching learning activity will keep the learner focus on the teacher, thus the classroom will be on teacher's control. The media used should be effective and interesting as Suyanto (2007: 6.4) said that the use of effective and interesting media in teaching can help the students understand the material easily.

There are many kinds of media that can be used in teaching English. Some good examples are picture, flashcard, realia, and video. Pictures or graphic materials refer to —non-photographic and two dimensions - materials which is utilized by the teachers to convey messages to the students. This kind of material includes drawings, charts, graphs, posters, cartoon, etc. Realia is defined by Nunan (1999: p. 313) as objects and teaching from the world outside the classroom that are used for teaching and learning. So, it can be inferred that realia is unmodified real things inside or outside the classroom which is used by the teacher for teaching learning process. Realia can be used as starting point to introduce the lesson and/or understanding concept of the material. Video is a combination of visual and audio visual media. Through video, children can see the visualization and hear the voice and sound. Flash card is a set of cards bearing information, as words or numbers, on either or both sides, used in classroom drills or in private study. One writes a question on a card and an answer overleaf. Flashcards can bear vocabulary, historical dates, formulas or any subject matter that can be learned via a question-and-answer format. Flashcards are widely used as a learning drill to aid memorization by way of spaced repetition. Teachers need to varied their media in classroom so that children feel eager to learn English

A good media need to meet with an appropriate method and techniques. If teachers don't use appropriate teaching methods to teach English to young learners, the achievement of learning process may not run well. Choosing the most appropriate activities, method or techniques which will help young learners learn languages better gains significance. When teaching young learners, teachers have to use fun and interactive communicative activities such as games, songs, and stories. Singing is

something that children like. Through songs the children can spell the English word easily and get vocabulary as much as they can especially supported by movement they made. By spelling the words and showing the movement at the same time stimulate children's understanding Games are every children's favourite. Children enjoy games and thus participate without anxiety. Games can motivate children greatly and they are activities which are usually familiar to children as regards structure, rules etc. It is in accordance with Lewis (2008: 5) stating that through games children experiment, discover, and interact with their social environment and it is a fun activity which gives the children opportunities to practice their English in relaxed and enjoyable ways.

Story telling is a widely used method in very young learners' classrooms. Stories offer numerous opportunities for children to learn the target language since they have rich vocabulary, surprise, repetition of language, rhymes, metaphors and dialogues (Cameron, 2001). Total Physical Response (TPR) is probably something that all good teachers use in the pre-primary classroom. TPR is about speech and action at the same time, which is just like the way children acquire their native language. One of the greatest advantages of TPR for the pre-primary classroom is that it doesn't have to be text dependent. TPR can be mostly oral. This means that children of any level of reading ability can react to it.

Most of Kindergartens in Padang have problem with media in teaching and learning to process. They have limited media in the classroom. Usually teacher creates their media from things that they can find around them. Related to teaching English, they also have limitation in using media, therefore teaching and learning process do not run well. For example, when the teachers introduce some vocabulary, they only show the picture to the children, mention the thing in the picture and ask children to repeat it. However, sometimes they use realia, show it to children and pronounce the words. They do have flashcard in their room, but rarely used. It is because they do not know how to use it. Only a few kindergartens have opportunity using better media. Mariana Kindergarten, for example, has used video in introducing new vocabulary. The kindergarten prepares laptop and LCD in the room, so the teacher could use it to show video, or movies to the children. The children enjoy the teaching and learning process very much. Through video, the children also can watch movies and songs, so they can sing along together. Singing makes their pronunciation better. In addition, in Mariana Kindergarten, there is a special room where the children can play and learn English. They try to make term "Learning English is fun" really works.

Beside media, most of kindergarten teachers in Padang do not know what are the appropriate method they can use in classroom. Singing songs is the most favourite method they choose. However, they have limited English songs for children. It is quite difficult for them to find good children song resources. Sometimes among teachers share songs with other teachers, but sometimes they create their own song. Unfortunately, they use inappropriate vocabulary in the song that make the song has no meaning. They compose Indonesia song to English song but the meaning become different.

Games is children favourite. Teachers create games that support English learning creatively. They adopt traditional games and put some English word in the game. The children play happily and learn English at the same time. Story telling the one strategy that they rarely do. They have no reference how to deal with this method. One main problem is pronunciation. They have difficulties in pronounce the word, so they seldom tell the stories to children in English. They also do not know good technique to tell story. As a result, the children look boring in the activity. However, many Kindergarten teachers in Padang understand about TPR Method. Most of them use this method especially when they use simple classroom command. In DEK Kindergarten this method is widely and continuously used. This method makes children acquire English as their first language. They do not look stress.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Children are valuable assets for any nation in this world. A strong nation has happy and healthy children. Happy and healthy children have many opportunities to reach better future. In the future they will face different world from nowadays. They need to communicate with other people from different countries. English as one of an International language plays an important role in the future, therefore English should be introduced to children in early age for many reasons. Teaching

English to young learner has its own challenge. Padang, as the biggest city in Sumatera Barat, has tried to introduce English to young learners. Many requirements need to be considered. Although it is not perfect yet, but at least kindergarten's teachers have start it. Many challenge found in the process such as constructing appropriate curriculum, preparing competence teachers, choosing and using proper media and method in the classroom. In summary, teaching English to young learners in Padang need more improvement so that children especially at young age could get many benefits from it.

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