

Teacher's strategies in teaching English to young learners in a private elementary school in Yogyakarta

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ABSTRACT

English is a widely learned language all throughout the world, including Indonesia. It is a crucial subject in elementary school and is essential for young learners, particularly those not native English speakers. Acquiring English as a foreign language is easier for young learners, as they are in a critical phase of language development, making it crucial to utilize this time effectively. Teaching elementary school students English requires efficient strategies to enable them to understand English learning easily. This study examines the problems that an English teacher in a private elementary school in Yogyakarta confront, along with the strategies employed to overcome them so that students can learn English to their full potential. This article employs qualitative methods by conducting observations and interviews with an English teacher at a private elementary school in Yogyakarta. The result showed that there were four strategies applied by teacher in teaching English. They are drilling vocabulary, interactive warming up, developing teaching modules, and using diverse teaching methods. Furthermore, the problems experienced by teacher were students' lack of vocabulary, and unconducive classroom conditions. These findings could be useful for those who are teaching English or working with young learners.

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1. Introduction

English is a widely learned language all throughout the world, including Indonesia. Apart from being an international language, English has a big role in various aspects of Indonesia, such as international relations, economy, education, and others (Oktavia et al., 2022). According to Nunan (2005), English is one of the most important instruments in the workplace. This is one of the reasons why English is a required subject in elementary school. According to Islahuddin (2023), learning English for young learners pertains to children who are not native English speakers and are in pre-primary or primary school.

English is simpler to acquire as a foreign language when students are young. Philp et al. (2008) state that learners in this age range are in a critical phase of their language development. Adults typically struggle more with language acquisition than young children do since they have passed the key age. Thus, it is important to make the most of this crucial time so that young students learning English as a foreign language may do so successfully.

Teaching a foreign language to young learners is a challenging task (Es-skare et al., 2023). Teaching a language that is not their mother tongue, especially to young learners, requires good techniques and strategies so that learning objectives are achieved. Children at this age on average prefer to play rather than learn. According to Febyawati et al. (2021) as cited in Petina et al. (2023), in order to effectively teach English to young learners, teachers must have a thorough awareness of the many traits that each student possesses, particularly those related to classroom instruction. Many students today find learning to be boring and easily sidetracked, especially when learning English. In order to help children embrace English more readily, teachers can offer the proper resources (Petina et al., 2023).

This is a challenge for educators to deliver lessons more interestingly so that students can pay attention to learning foreign languages. Teachers typically employ strategies to ensure that pupils fully comprehend the topic (Annajmi, 2023). According to Anil (2011) as cited in Annajmi (2023), the definition of a learning strategy is a learning plan including objectives, framework, desired learner behavior, and a list of techniques to implement the strategy. Learning strategies are ways that educators choose and use to deliver learning materials to students (Uno, 2008). The techniques used by teachers can assist students in achieving learning objectives (Annajmi, 2023).

These problems are what led us to conduct this research. We looked at the challenges faced by English teachers while instructing young students in a foreign language and the methods they utilize to get beyond these difficulties. The study was guided by two open-ended questions: (1) What challenges do English teachers have while instructing young learners in English? (2) What are their strategies to face the challenges?

2. Method

Descriptive qualitative research has been used in this study to obtain data. The research subjects involved an English teacher at A private elementary school in Yogyakarta. In this study, the researcher collected data through semi-structured interviews. Researchers collected data by interviewing an English teacher at A private elementary school in Yogyakarta. The interview results were written down, then the data were categorized and explained, and finally, conclusions were drawn. The results of this study were checked by the research subjects to ensure the validity of the data.

3. Findings and Discussion

Based on the interviews, the researchers discovered some information about the challenges encountered and the strategies employed to teach English to young learners.

3.1. Findings

a. Challenges faced by the English teacher in a private elementary school in Yogyakarta

There are two major challenges that English teachers face when teaching in the classroom, such as students' lack of vocabulary, and unconducive classroom conditions. Some of the statements the teacher gave during the interview are quoted to corroborate the description of the findings.

The first challenge is the students' low vocabulary. Students who have limited vocabulary find it difficult to complete projects or tests, therefore they will continually ask the teacher what the meaning of the words or even phrases are, making other students envious and losing attention. Furthermore, students have trouble pronouncing particular phrases.

"[...] what frequently occurs is that the children usually have difficulty remembering and there are still vocabulary that they don't know, then how to pronounce it. They are still confused when working on tests or examinations [...]"

The second problem is that classroom conditions are frequently unfavorable; for instance, as learning begins, many students are still running around, laughing with each other, or eating in class.

"[...] because children have various characters, there must be class conditions that are different from other classes, especially special classes, when they are taught, immediately run here and there [...]"

b. English teaching strategies applied by the teacher in A private elementary school in Yogyakarta

Some strategies for teaching English that the teacher in A private elementary school in Yogyakarta uses in class are drilling vocabulary, interactive warming up, developing teaching modules, and using diverse teaching methods.

Drilling is the first approach used to expand students' language vocabulary. Drilling vocabulary is given at the beginning of the session; it can be written on the whiteboard or delivered by the teacher to help students improve their writing skills. Aside from writing it down, the teacher and students should also repeat the vocabulary words accurately.

"[...] when it comes to vocabulary, I usually write it on the whiteboard. Then, children are asked to write it down so that they can memorize it later [...]"

The next strategy is classroom conditioning, which involves providing engaging warm-ups to capture children's interest and focus. The activity can be varied, such as providing games to capture students' attention. The third technique is to develop teaching modules and materials for classroom use. Also, planning several teaching approaches, such as providing some English tests with flashcards, allowing them to discuss in groups, and learning while singing.

"[...] preparing the material to be taught and conditioning the students, sometimes if the class is in the afternoon after the break, they become lazy. So, sometimes the class conducts while playing, invites students to quiz, and makes groups to work on English questions. [...] they prefer to play and sing, so at the beginning of the class, we will sing first [...]"

3.2. Discussion

The first problem is students' limited vocabulary. Since they seldom use English in their daily lives, they find it difficult to memorize English words and phrases. Thus, students need exposure to gain new vocabulary. Students can be exposed to language through tasks developed with the context, within meaningful activities, or through students' correlated experiences (Meisani, 2022). As a result, teachers must work harder to provide students with plenty of opportunities and encourage them to utilize English in all situations (Pratiwi et al., 2023).

The last problem is related to the unconducive class. The class is not conducive due to the presence of certain disruptive students disrupting the class, then affecting the others. Other students cannot concentrate when the disruptive students are making noise. Furthermore, unpleasant classmates generally cause fights, which makes learning tedious since the teacher must reconcile fighting students (Pratiwi et al., 2023).

Furthermore, to balance the obstacles of the classroom, a teacher must have the appropriate method in place to ensure the subject can be conveyed. The first strategy is drilling. This technique focuses on vocabulary development. Listen and Repeat is a method used by teachers to assist students in understanding or memorizing vocabulary by directly copying their teacher (Wulandari et al., 2020). The second strategy is providing a warm-up before starting the lesson to catch students' attention. A remarkable warm-up can be used before the class to guarantee that the students are ready.

Another technique is to optimize the preparation of the teaching module, beginning with the materials, methods, class activities, and assessments. According to Malik et al. (2022), good teaching and learning for young learners involves an action plan, classroom observation, and teacher self-reflection. Teachers may additionally maximize preparation with classroom activities that are enjoyable for students. Teachers might utilize classroom activities such as reading a story, singing a song, and playing games. Poems, songs, fairy tales, short plays, cartoons, and other visual aids are highly effective (Stakanova & Tolstikhina, 2014). Stakanova and Tolstikhina (2014) state that games motivate and assist learners to maintain their excitement and enthusiasm. Games can also assist teachers in creating environments in which language can be useful and meaningful.

4. Conclusion

Teachers use a variety of strategies to engage, motivate, and empower students in achieving the objective of useful English language education for young learners. The study reveals that teaching English to young learners requires a diverse strategy that combines creativity, patience, adaptability, and a thorough understanding of pedagogical methodologies.

Teachers play a critical role in fostering language acquisition and development by creating a supportive and exciting learning environment. Educators can accommodate students' diverse learning styles and needs by combining interactive activities, visual aids, narratives, games, and technological integration.

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