

ENGLISH FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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ABSTAK

Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris kepada anak-anak sangat menarik namun penuh tantangan. Menarik karena anak-anak diperkenalkan dengan Bahasa Inggris ketika mereka masih kecil yang secara teoritis sangat baik untuk penguasaan Bahasa Inggris. Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris juga menantang karena para guru Bahasa Inggris dituntut untuk mampu mendesain materi pembelajaran sedemikian rupa sehingga memungkinkan anak-anak bisa memahami Bahasa Inggris selama proses pembelajaran itu. Dalam mendesain materi pembelajaran, ada dua aspek penting yang harus diperhatikan yakni berkaitan dengan teknik tertentu yang dipakai oleh guru Bahasa Inggris dan Materi Pembelajaran itu sendiri.

Kata Kunci : Anak-anak, Teknik Khusus, Materi Pembelajaran dan Desain Materi

Introduction

Since 1994, the government has issued an educational policy concerning the learning of the English language to young learners in Indonesia. It is so interesting to hear such a policy, yet it is, at the same time, so challenging. The policy indicates that the government is in the right track, that introducing English to young learners is so beneficial for sake of Indonesia now and in the future. Ellis (1988) argues that the age of the so called childhood is the golden time for children to easily acquire a language. Thus, the learning of the English for young learners reflects the stand point of the government following the mentioned concept and at the same time reinforcing teachers of English to do their best for the learning of English to take place. Septy (2006) is one of so many teachers who positively responded to such a policy.

It is so challenging for the teachers of English because they are demanded to be able to create the learning of English to occur. Of course, this is not an easy way. It is unlike turning your hand upside down. Teacher of English have to do some required activities, like: (1) selecting an appropriate technique. This concerns ways teachers have to employ to help students to learn. (2) Selecting materials. There must be appropriate materials for students to learn. (3) Designing, learning materials have to be designed in such a way, following the steps promoted by the selected technique. The design has to enable the learning to take place meaningfully.

The teaching of English to young learners is a futuristic step the government has taken. Multi aims accompany such a policy, among others are to help young learners be more proficient in English; to help increase the quality of human resources of Indonesia in the coming era. The government has envisioned that good command of English has to start from the elementary education. Undeniably, the good command of English will help the young of this country acquire knowledge, science and technology. In addition, the good command of English becomes a significant capital to the Indonesian to be counted in the international labour market. The good command of English helps build comparative – competitive capacity of the Indonesians as

international members who live together in this global village. To compare, the Filipinos, because of their proficiency in English, have been recruited to work in banks and airports in the Middle East. The Indians have sent so many outstanding scholars to work in the United States of America. The government of these two nations has already decided that the learning of English begins formally from the elementary school. What a decision! Yet, it is well known that English is the second language in their individual countries.

In Indonesia, English is just a foreign language. English is only used in the class when learning of English is taking place. Yet, it has to be acknowledged that the use of English inside the class is, as matter of fact, so limited. Many teachers of English prefer using Bahasa Indonesia instead using English when they are working with students in the classroom. They believe students will better understand an English text if it is translated into Bahasa Indonesia. Students will learn grammar easily if it is taught in Bahasa Indonesia.

Distinguishing Characteristics of Young Learners

Young learners are a group of people whose age ranges from 5 to 11 (Gail, 2006). They are those who are learning at the elementary schools. So they are children. As children they have specific characteristics which distinguish themselves from groups of learners whose age is above 11. The specific characteristics of this group of learners are visible in their behaviors. The following are their dominant characteristics:

1. Overtly, this group of learners has strong imitation ability. They are able to imitate what people surrounding them are doing. In terms of language acquisition, they, for example, imitate word pronunciation and produce sentences as the adults produce. These are two of so many reasons why they have almost as the elders have and they produce almost the same sentence construction of the sentence construction of the adult.
2. Strongly they have repetition ability. Indeed, in the process of language acquisition, children will repeat what an elder is saying out loud.
3. Overtly, this group of learners has competence to receive input and strong retention power to retain what they imitate and repeat in their memory. What they hear, they imitate and they repeat, they are retained, and later they become their own language property.
4. Covertly, this group of learners has ability to learn a language easily and faster (Ellis, 1988).
5. Overtly, this group of learners is active, moving and playing, both individually and in groups. Even in a “formal situation” (in the class when learning is taking place) they are active, are moving and are playing with their desk neighbors.
6. But, this group of learners is not so attentive and they do not have good analytical ability.

In relation to the learning, these characteristics of young learners have to be taken into real consideration by teachers of English. If teachers of English are conscious of these characteristics, they may be able to manage the class and help their learners learn meaningfully. By such a consciousness, teachers of English are able to create fun learning situation. Where in learners can learn while they are active, moving from here to there and playing or while they actively moving and playing the learning may occur.

Supporting Theories to the Education of English to Young Learners

Chomsky (1965), the most leading figure of linguistics, asserts that to every human being, since his/her birth, is endowed the so called “inner capacity” or what can also be referred to as “Language Acquisition Device” (LAD). It is born-with capacity which enables someone to pick up a language with ease in his or her childhood, e.g, children so easily acquire their mother tongue. In line with the learning of English to young learners, LAD endowed to every human being becomes a strong concept.

Also, Chomsky ascertains that children can acquire their mother tongue despite the insufficient input of the language they may have. Citing Von Humboldt (1836), Chomsky asserts that in the efforts to acquire the mother tongue, it is not necessary to teach the language, but to let children be in such a natural learning atmosphere, because the learning of the language will naturally occur. The most plausible reason is that every human being is endowed ability to accept, to select, to synthesize the input, to draw some “constructs” (principles of knowledge) by their own upon the bases of received input.

Nowadays, classroom where formal learning takes place has been claimed to be designed in such a way that it may represent such a natural atmosphere where in a conducive learning of English can be actualized.

For the sake of the education of English for young learners, Devine (1986) underlines the importance of providing appropriate learning material. It is strongly suggested to provide materials which are in the realm of learners. Devine asserts that materials related to learners’ schema can help learners learn more meaningfully. More concretely, learning materials containing values will help learners not only learn the language, but also to help form their personality. On this basic, the specific materials needed are those with cultural values: behaviors, products, and ideas.

The Learning of English

Basically, English for young learners has to be designed in the line with the psychological growth of this group of young learners as already proposed by the great Chomskyan concept. The design must attract full attention of the learners. On in this way, teachers of English may help their students to participate meaningfully in learning the language. Yet, the design must maximally tolerate children’s characteristics. The product of the design must be in some kind of “learning while playing and vice versa” style.

In order to design appropriate learning materials, local folktales, for instance, have to undergo the so called “simplification” concerning vocabularies, the plot and length of the story. The module of material design can be as what proposed by Devine (1986), reviewed by Gutierrez (2001). The module has three phases: pre activities: while activities, and post-activities. In **pre-activities** phases, some activities are designed to activate interest and motivation of learners to learn English; included is the topic to be discussed. More specifically, learning activities are designed to familiarize learners to vocabularies of the topic and also the background of knowledge of learners related to the topic is to be activated. In **while activities** phase, activities are designed to discuss thoroughly about the content of the topic and the implementation of the content of the topic to learners as individual and as group as well.

Activities are in forms of “exercise”. The exercises can be in forms of games, songs, role play, etc. meanwhile in the **post activities** phase, activities are designed to recheck and at the same time to retain input from the topic. Thus it is to evaluate if the message has been well received and retained or not in students’ memory. The forms, can be like Chinese wishes, Simon says, etc.

The following is just an example of the proposed material design. The title of story to read is **LUA KIAK**. It is folk story from students speaking Tetun of Belu Regency, the frontline frontier to Timor Leste. As a matter of fact, Lua Kiak has a long and complicated plot. So, it is necessary to do the so called “simplification to the said folktale.” The simplified version of the story is as follows:

LUA KIAK

Lua Kiak was an orphan. He was a skillful carver. The king liked his carving. The king asked him to get things he carved. He went across seven straits to get the things. Lua Kiak dived to the bottom of the sea to get the things. It was a very risky job to. But he was successful.

He was away from his village several years. There he married his uncle’s daughter. To his luck, he got a magic sword. With his canoe and asword he went home. He defeated the king and obtained the throne.

Pre-Activities

- (a) Greeting
- (b) Pronouncing words: orphan, skillful, carver, carving, carved, straits dive, bottom, risky, successful, village, married, uncle, daughter, luck, magic canoe, magic sword, defeated, throne.
- (c) Pictures: a young man with a crown on his head, a sword on his right hand, and a conoe nearby
- (d) Song: can be created

While- Activities

Drilling: word by word, sentence by sentence

Role play: Lua Kiak, Uncle

Questions: in a dialogue form

- Good morning, boy
- Good morning, pak
- Is the story interesting?
- Yes/No
- Do you want to be like Lua Kiak
- Yes/No
- Is Lua Kiak a good man
- Yes/No

Post- Activities

- Oral review
- Is Lua Kiak an Orphan?
- Who is the mother of Lua Kiak?
- Is Lua Kiak a king?

Closing Remarks

The education for young learners has to be well-planned and designed. Only with good plan and design, the education of English can be successful. It can help students gain the mastery and proficiency of English they are learning.

Learning of English since childhood will help learners to have more promising future. Good command of English can help learners to have access to the richness of knowledge, science and technology. It is evident that English is the most dominant leading medium in which knowledge, science, and technology are documented.

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