

Teaching English to Beginners

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***Abstract.** English as a foreign language/international language should be introduced and taught to children from early age. Here the writer is limiting only to the children whose age ranges from 6 to 12 years old, those who are sitting in primary school. Young learners at their tender age have the flexibility in their physical as well as their mental domain to feel and make sense of a language. These children enjoy fun activities that will fit to their unique playing world. In their learning activities, listening and speaking will take most of their hours, without neglecting other language skills, i.e. reading and writing. The materials of the lessons will vary depending on their language competence. In teaching young learners a teacher should take into account: teaching materials, class activities, speed, teaching aids, etc. In short, teaching English to young learners need a thorough preparation and planning.*

Introduction

English is an international language that is spoken in many parts of the world. If one wants to succeed in his profession as well as other environment, he has to master the English language passively as well as actively. Especially at this age in which English is used as a medium of communication in modern and professional world. Based on this fact, children should be prepared well, i.e. introducing English from the early age.

Children should be prepared to face their future by learning English. In Indonesia English is introduced and taught to children/young learners with the of age range 6 to 12 year old, sometimes even younger, here writer only refers to primary school learners. Young learners at their tender age are still sensitive and flexible to receive training in a foreign language. Their physical as well intellectual abilities are very receptive to a new language. Their physical organs, especially their sound productive organs are in the most stage to learn, and be trained in producing new sounds and meaning of a foreign language. In their mental stage, their minds are in an open and sensitive stage to open, absorb and understand new information as well as knowledge. So young learners are in the most suitable stage to learn, be trained, and be used to reception and production of new foreign language.

English in Indonesia is a foreign language. The fact is that most of Indonesians are bilinguals; they speak two languages equally well. The first language is their mother tongue e.g. people in East Java speak Javanese. Their second language, the national lingua franca - Bahasa Indonesia which is spoken in formal situation, e.g. in offices, in academic environments, in schools, and government offices. Children/Young

learners learn English as their first foreign language (EFL). As we know English is now included in school curriculum; English is taught to the primary students from the first grade. There is a tendency that English is even introduced to kindergarten pupils. However, in small towns English is taught in the fourth grade.

Considering English that is taught as foreign language in which the students are not exposed to the real language speaking society, the learning motivation is different from that of those who learn English as a second language (ESL). Students who learn English as a second language will have a quicker understanding and proficiency of the language because they are totally exposed to the society where the language is spoken. An example of this is, an Indonesian child who followed their parents and lived in Australia, within a relatively short time he will be able to actively communicate in English. What's more, he has a direct experience with the culture. This will strengthen his acquisition of the language.

Children love and enjoy physical and mental activities that are fun. Considering that these learners have just started to learn, to read and write in their first language they will be mostly trained in listening in English. Substantial exposure to sounds of English, whether from the class teachers' voice and/or English from electronic gadgets will make them familiar with the sounds of English. At this stage, they will learn the language passively, but at the same time, they are used to the sounds and understand the meanings. The students will sub-consciously repeat what the class teacher instructed and said. When the teacher gives instruction in English, the student will understand and obey the instruction with real physical activities.

In listening activities, the class teacher should say English utterances in a simple, and short way, since the English sounds are quiet new and strange for the students the teacher should pronounce slowly, clearly and loudly. Repetition is recommendable. The students will be familiar with the sounds and they will understand the meaning. The teacher should give pronunciation examples of individual sounds. In this case, the students will notice the difference between the sounds of English and the sounds of their language. They will make a conscious efforts to produce as near as possible to the pronunciation of the target language.

The students will be guided gradually to speaking activities. The class teacher will give instruction in which the students must respond verbally as well as physically. The teacher may resort to the use of the first language, Bahasa Indonesia, to facilitate the students' understanding. The students' responses start from short and simple English leading to more difficult and longer form. Through many repetitions and developments the students will be able to produce short simple, natural and meaningful English. Learning in speaking can be given through miming, rhyming, chanting, and singing. In miming, the students are given instructions in which they have to respond in physical activities. If

the students can give correct activities it shows that they understand the instructions. Rhyming and chanting are almost similar in the activities; the difference is that rhyming is production of utterances ended in the same sounds; whereas chanting is production of repetitious sounds. The students specially enjoy singing sessions in which the students can sing and act out.

More demanding activities such as story telling, or participating in puppet shows will give stronger stimuli for the student to advance more in their acquisition of the English language. In story telling in which the students are expected to be able to say long utterances of English, the students, under the teachers' guidance and encouragement, must put a serious endeavor to perform. Only students who have mastered a relatively advanced English can do this. In puppet shows, be hand or finger puppets, a group of students will perform to present a story. The students have to memorized the dialogues and work harmoniously with their peers to present a story. These two activities, story telling and puppet shows will give strong supports and facilitation to the students to internalize the cultural values of the language and to advance rapidly to the proficiency of the language.

Theory (Concept to be discussed)

English is considered as the most important foreign language as it is a means of international communication in this globalization era. If one wants to succeed in his profession and social community he must be able to communicate in the English language. We see that most information media is using the English language. Many parents realize the importance of this language for their children's future. They think that the future is very much influenced by the children's proficiency in the English language. They, therefore, are eager to send their children to schools and courses which teach English from the early age. The parents are confident that, when their children get English from an early age it will guarantee more success for their children to master the language.

Many parents believed that young children have greater facility to understand that imitate what they hear in school. Children in their early age are in the most suitable stage to start learning a foreign language, that their psychological level are the most receptive to new language, their audio-verbal ability can imitate and produce the sounds of the target language (The Primary English teacher's guide, Jean Brewster and Gail Ellis with Denis Girard, Penguin English Guides, page 3). Children are interested and enthusiastic to learn new things and they enjoy fun activities. They are also open minded to know the new values from different language.

English language in Indonesia is a foreign language, so English taught in schools and courses is included in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) not as ESL (English as a Second Language). English in Indonesia is a foreign language because it's not used as a medium of

communication in formal occasions. In Indonesia we have Bahasa Indonesia as our lingua franca: It is a means of communication throughout the country despite the people's different races and backgrounds. English is spoken by limited circles. English is not taught as a second language. Indonesian students don't have the privileges of being exposed to English speaking society. This doesn't reduce the importance of the English language as an international language, which many parents think will support their children's success in their future.

Many parents who have sent their children to learn English have the aim of giving competence of English to the children so that they will be able to communicate in English. Likewise, many teachers have similar goals of teaching English to young learners: teaching English to the children in the early age is to introduce the new language so that the students will have good mastery in the language in four skills; listening, speaking, reading writing.

In East Java, especially in big cities like Surabaya and Malang, English is taught to the primary students starting from the first grade. In some international schools, English is taught from kindergarten. The teaching materials given to the students depend on the student's grades. For example in the first grade the students will be given listening and speaking activities more than reading and writing, because at this stage the students have just started to learn to read and write. This is also true in private courses in which students of the early stages are given mostly listening and speaking activities.

The students are primarily guided and trained to communicate in the target language meaningfully. The class teacher encourages the students to speak up by providing, if possible, almost real communication. In this case role-plays and simulations have become very popular in CLT/Communication Language Teaching (The Practice of English Language Teaching by Jeremy Hammer, page 69). The concern of CLT is with spoken language of the language as much as with written grammar, and the ability of when and how it is appropriate to say certain things. Activities in CLT are by providing plentiful exposure to language in use and plenty of opportunity to use the language. Considering that speaking has the priority so at times fluency comes before accuracy (correctness). The students are encouraged to speak fluently but sometimes they ignore the grammatical rules. In this stage the class teacher must step-in to intervene to correct the mistakes.

Motivation is very important, because it gives a drive for the students to be involved in speaking activities. The class teacher has a vital role in maintaining the students' motivation. The class situation must be made in such a way to create a relax and comfortable atmosphere. This will hopefully put the students in warmth and coziness in that they will feel at home and see the teacher as a friendly figure. The students will be more confident to speak up and be involved in class activities without fearing to make mistakes. The class teacher should give prompt

encouragement and she can give fun activities that the student will enjoy: games, songs, miming, chanting, rhyming, etc.

Children are children, in which they cannot be separated from playing. Class activities, therefore, should be made in such a way that they have playing sense. One example is TPR/Total Physical Response in which the class teacher gives instruction and the students will make physical responses. Here the students are learning the teacher instructions. The students even sometimes imitate the teacher's instructions. Another example is singing and moving (*gerak dan lagu*) in which the students sing and move harmoniously according to the rhythm of the song. In singing the students trained their pronunciation while at the same time understands the meaning of the song when moving they are active physically. The beat of the music will add to the cheerfulness of the class atmosphere. In the class, physical movements must be change to quieter activities. This is to put the class atmosphere in healthy balance.

In the early stages listening and speaking take most of learning time. The class teacher, however, should also give training in reading and writing according to the students' level of competence. Reading materials should start from short sentences leading to longer sentences even to one paragraph. Reading written materials must also be accompanied by understanding of the texts. Students of the early stage should also be trained in writing, beginning with correct spelling.

In managing an English class for a primary students from the early stage the class teacher should abide by the first requirement of a teacher; mature, healthy and mature-personality in which the teacher is willing to give her dedication and integrity to teaching young students. Realizing that teaching English to young learners is a serious and yet dynamic task, the class teacher must give due consideration: choice of materials, speed of teaching, organization of teaching units, thorough preparations, and maintenance of class order.

Pedagogical Implication

In the very early stage of teaching English to young learners, where listening and speaking take the most of the class time, the class teacher can begin to teach greetings, and simple exchange of expressions. The children will listen attentively to her and will respond verbally when he is asked. In this case the teacher should make many repetitions to make sure the students will pronounce the word correctly. She can use the students' native language when necessary to ensure that the students understand well. This stage of speaking activity should lead to, step by step, more complex forms of language, e.g. short and simple sentences.

Teaching a song to the students as a change can be given when the teacher sees the students start to be restless. The teacher can introduce a song which contains elements of language teaching, e.g. "A-B-C Song" this song teaches alphabets and the teacher should give example of correct

pronunciation of each letter. For refreshing the last two lines of the song can be changed with new words, which will stimulate the students.

To encourage students to speak the class teacher should give equal attention to all of the students, the class may contain mixed abilities, in which some students are quick learners and some learners are weak learners. Some students are very active and some others are quiet and shy. The class teacher should ask wisely by giving equal attention to all students. Give more demanding task to cleverer students and give simple-to-answer to the weaker ones. The class teacher should give freedom to the students to move about in the class, that the students will not hesitate to stand up, to come to the board, to ask their friends in English, and even to ask to the teacher.

Role-plays and simulations can be used to create almost real situations. All the students can take part in turns. The students will be excited to take a role of their desired character. The situations can be of those that are familiar with, e.g. teacher-student, doctor-patient, mother-child situations.

In listening activities, the class teacher begin with very simple examples of English sounds which eventually lead to more complex, longer utterances in English which may constitute a story. The teacher can read or tell the story slowly, clearly, loudly, and correctly with lively expressions. The students enjoy listening to stories, they will be captivated and they will sub-consciously 'touch' the cultural values of the language. Questions and answers of the story will ensure the students comprehensions. Apart from that the students will internalize the language forms and start to feel more confident.

One of the most popular language games enjoyed by the students is "Simon Says": It is a very easy game where the students are trained to listen carefully and to find-out whether they can respond correctly. The students may respond physically when the class-teacher begins the instruction with "Simon Says". The students have to keep still when the teacher doesn't begin her instruction with "Simon Says". In this game the students will focus their concentration on the teachers' instruction. Much later one of the students may lead the game.

Apart from listening and speaking activities, reading and writing are also given a fair share. These four skills are given in a sequence of undivided materials. Reading activities can start from individual letters/correct spelling which may lead to more difficult and longer written texts. The teacher may begin by reading the text slowly and correctly in which the student listen attentively. Explanation of difficult words can be given so that students can understand the texts. The teacher may then give question and the students answer them. After that re-telling can follow depending on the students language competency.

In the beginning students are trained to write individual letters. This may develop into writing activities of longer and complex sentences. In this case the students must give correct grammatical rules in their

paper. Correction of the mistakes must be done promptly by the teacher. The students must know what their mistakes are and their due corrections.

Students who learn a foreign language which is a surface manifestation of a foreign culture may be introduced to a new culture bringing new concepts of values. Students having been exposed to some degree to a foreign culture the student will develop a positive attitude and respect to other cultures which are different from theirs. This open-mindedness will in a way become a necessary and healthy character which will be useful in his later personality development. His relative competence in the English language will strengthen his confidence and self-esteem which will pave the way to independence, freedom, and success of his future.

Conclusion

Many parents in Indonesia have the opinion that their children should be introduced to English from the early age. They considered that English is a very important language for the success of their children in the future. Children from early age still have the flexible capability of learning and imitating a foreign language which will greatly facilitate their acquisition of the foreign language. Children in their unique psychological state enjoy playing and fun activities. Many English teachers, therefore, proposed that teaching English to young learners should be in a fun a relaxed atmosphere. Teaching English in the class rooms are therefore combined with various fun activities, for example: games, singing and moving, chanting, rhyming, and storytelling. The students after acquiring some competence in English language will acquire some cultural values which will positively influenced their attitude and personality. Proficiency in English language will give students more confidence and self-esteem which are the necessary and important attributes of their personality.

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