

TEACHING ENGLISH FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract : Language as a means of communication plays very important role in social relationship among human beings. The English language is the first foreign language we teach to children at very early stages of schooling. The primary aim of teaching English in the early years of schooling is to motivate young learners to be ready and have self-confident in learning English at higher levels of education. Some children are born to parents who are polyglots, so they have to acquire two or three different languages. Some others learn second or third language because they have to immigrate to a new country. Others learn English as foreign language because English is not their native language in their country. Teaching English to young learners then can be beneficial or detrimental to learners. It will be beneficial if the teachers can facilitate learning and enable learners to bring to language learning their curiosity and eagerness to make sense of the world, as a result, the teachers may help the learners are able to overcome their problem even the most demanding tasks with enthusiasm and willingness.

Keywords : Teaching English, English for young learners

INTRODUCTION

There are some importance of teaching English to young learners such as The earlier the onset of foreign language learning, the greater the chances for language proficiency. The learners have great opportunity to have native-like pronunciation; improving overall school performance and superior problem-solving skills; Development of lifelong ability to communicate with more people; Better understanding of other cultures. On the other hand, teaching to young learners will be fail if the teachers are not able to provide them with pleasant learning situations that the teachers may lead young learners into feeling of hatred toward the language. Here are some possible risks can occur during teaching English to young learners which have been described by Sutrisno (2013) such as (1) The teachers can put the young learners in a risky situation if those learners are taught by anybody without any education skill or adequate training; (2). The young learners run the risk of losing the opportunity to acquire pronunciation if those learners copy the inappropriate pronunciation as exemplified by teachers. Based on the Critical Period Hypothesis theory, this could make potential risk for those young learners because it

causes fossilization for them or their potential to acquire the language might go in vain. This is also caused when the teachers give assessments which fail to measure what learners have learned; (3). Another risk, which might arise from teaching English for young learners is the choice of instructional materials. As we know, there have been a huge number of English books for primary school available everywhere. Some are poorly written and some are very well designed. Should teachers not select the book needed for their students carefully, they may not give a good foundation for the learners. They may contribute problems in the process of learning, instead.

Over the last fifty years or so, psycholinguists have learned much about children's language learning. In addition, Cameron (2001) as cited in Hashemi and Azizinezhad (2011), says that the differences between teaching a foreign language to young learners, in contrast to adults are obvious. Children are often more enthusiastic and livelier as learners than adults, and children often seem less embarrassed than adults at talking in a new language. All normally developing children master the complexity of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary of their first language

within the first four or five years of their lives. Not only do children learn to use highly sophisticated grammatical forms of their first language, they also develop an impressive vocabulary. During particularly intense periods of language learning, such as toddlerhood, young children learn a new word every waking hour of their day.

There is an assumption that young children facile language as like Eric Lenneberg (1960s) as cited in Gordon (2007) where he studied about certain behaviors shared a number of species. In particular, he was interested in behaviors that are:

1. shared by an entire species;
2. learned at around the same time by all the members of the species;
3. learned following a rigid and predictable schedule when no amount of instruction would make any difference;
4. learned instinctively, because members of the species cannot help developing this particular trait.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As a result, Lenneberg concluded that if a behavior in a species meets all these criteria, that behavior is congenital or innate. It can be observed in baby ducks' behavior. When newly hatched ducks see a moving object (whether it be their mom, the leg of a farmer or the broom), they start walking behind that object. Thus, it can be concluded that ducks "learn" to follow the moving objects. However, it is important to realize that ducks cannot help this behavior, because it is genetically pre-determined. All baby ducks follow a moving object, provided they see it shortly after they are hatched. This Lenneberg's term is well known with *language instinct*. Lenneberg argued that just as a duckling cannot help following its mother, a child cannot help learning a mother tongue. Pointing out that human speech develops in all members of the human species, that humans begin to speak roughly around the same age, and that human language learning follows a predictable sequence of developmental steps, Lenneberg hypothesized that human language ability is innate. In other words, children learn language quickly and easily, simply because they cannot help it (children's facility with language can be explained as stemming from children's genetic predisposition for language learning).

However, Noam Chomsky made explanation about which aspects of the language system are innate (congenital). His theory is

popularly known as *universal grammar*. Chomsky hypothesized that children are quick to master the grammars of their languages, because their capacity to generate grammatically structured speech is innate and because a special grammatical blueprint is prewired into children's brains. He also pointed out that children who are as young as three or four years old learn basic rules of sentence formation and effortlessly produce structurally complex sentences. (Even when children make errors and produce patterns such as **helded* or **Did you did it?* They only produce language patterns that are potentially consistent with the grammatical patterns to be found in the language.

It is obviously observed that in learning language, children begin learning simple expressions by means it is extremely important that teachers not only get children to learn language, but also encourage them to learn it positively. Scott and Lisbeth (1992) which has been cited in Hashemi and Azizezhad (2011) present some characteristics of young learners-8 to 10 years old such as:

- They are mature enough
- They have particular point of view
- They are able to describe the difference between facts and fictions
- They are curious of asking questions
- They believe in what is said and the real world to express and comprehend meaning/message
- They have distinct opinions about what they like and what they dislike
- They are open to what happens in the classroom and begin asking a teacher's decision
- They can cooperate with each other and learn from others.

However, in teaching English to young learners needs good teaching skills, creativity, thorough preparation and patience. Teachers must have all these attributes in order to make young learners keep motivated. Also, teachers should consider about another characteristics which distinguish them from teenagers and adults. Those characteristics are described below:

- Young learners have a short attention span
- Young learners are very active, imaginative, and egocentric
- Young learners love praise and reward
- Young learners are less shy than older learners

- Young learners enjoy imitating and are skillful in listening accurately
- Young learners enjoy learning through playing, acting, making and doing
- Young learners understand language as units not separate words
- Young learners interpret meaning without necessarily understanding the individual word
- Young learners learn indirectly rather than directly
- Young learners develop physically, mentally, and conceptually.

Some aspects of TEYL which should be taken into consideration are the teaching of listening, reading comprehension, and Speaking to young learners because language learners are likely to experience success in learning to read and write if they spend sufficient time and writing and if they derive pleasure out of these activities. However, Gordon (2007) said that literacy instruction should start early in English classroom because writing is less threatening than speaking in that children need to be afraid of mispronouncing an unfamiliar word, children can have their first experiences of producing written statements in English well before they speaking in target language.

Here are some strategies in literacy instruction in the English Language Classroom. One of these is using whole language in authentic literacy events. Teachers encourage children to use oral and written language the way it is used in real life. Language learners need to participate in authentic literacy events for both reading and writing activities that they can gain from newspaper, magazine, articles, fairy tales, advertisement, prescriptions, song lyrics, poems, and etc. The words are available in these literary works sometimes are repeated several times. The teachers should stay away from practicing the reading of disjointed decontextualized target language list, nor do they ask students to practice writing word lists made of items such as *the* or *in*. In addition, teachers should encourage learners to use whole pieces of written language while reading for meaning and writing for communication.

The other strategy is creating a literate classroom environment. Here, the classroom environment is conducive to reading and writing if the classroom is converted into a virtual dictionary with the help of labels and poster size dictionaries. Poster size dictionaries are helpful

resources, not pieces of decoration, and it is important that children understand their role in the classroom. When implementing a writing activity, the teacher asks students to identify a dictionary that might help them work on a given piece of writing. Another strategy include language Experience Approach (LEA) and dictated stories. Language experience approach integrates teaching reading and writing with some type of a lived experience. It is also commonly referred to under the name of Dictated Stories. The LEA activity consists of four steps such as *experience, description, transcription, and reading*. First step is the teacher engages children in a group activity, then children describe the activity they just experienced in their own words. In the third transcription step, the teacher transcribes the stories as the children tell them. Then, the final one is the children read the texts they have created. Unlike the LEA which provides about the activity, dictated stories provide personal information or describe objects such as a class trip, a class pet, and etc. Dictated stories that are authored by children and portray children's own experiences make excellent reading materials.

The last possible strategy is using pattern texts approach. In this case, shared reading of pattern books, such as short stories, fairy tales, poems, or songs that contain a recurrent pattern of words, phrases, or sentences are also effective in the primary level because their repetitive structure scaffolds text prediction. For example: poems and songs contain a simple, easy to follow, repetitive language pattern can also work as pattern books. Another example is personal narratives created by teachers make excellent pattern books. This pattern texts will be beneficial to language learner needs if it is syntactically simple, natural, and reflective of the kind of language that children are likely to hear in their day-to-day communication.

DISCUSSION

According to Harmer (2001: 38) as cited in Hashemi and Azizinezhad (2011) clearly defines that young learners learn differently from adult learners because they easily get bored, losing interest after a short of period of time. It is recommended that teachers keep children active and motivated by using songs, story, game or a teacher-made activity. TPR (Total Physical Response) which is a method is developed by James Asher's (1977) describes children listen and

physically respond to a series of instruction or commands from the teacher. The more fun the activities, the better they will remember the language materials presented. Therefore, in teaching English to young learners should be enjoyable, interesting, repetitive and understandable. Here are some ideas that can be engaged into classroom activities such as

- Switch to simple English in the class
- Speak clearly and concisely
- Use enjoyable language learning games
- Have sense of humor
- Use body language when necessary
- Get your real objects to the class
- Let them listen to music and watch cartoons in English
- Make a list of classroom language for each activity and prepare to use it during the day
- Use wall charts or posters to help children remember that you are doing English
- Encourage children to use English for routine classroom requests by praising any effort they make
- Make a list of everyday instructions

The issues of assessing English as a foreign language for young learners might be challenging and offer some practical suggestions. English is taught to learners at an ever earlier stage of their education. Parents often attach a great deal of importance to how well their children are progressing in English. This situation presents teachers with the challenge of having to assess young learners. According to Rea-Dickins and Rixon (1999) clarify teachers assessed their young learners by using *grammar and vocabulary tests, single sentence exercises, gap-filling, vocabulary matching, restricted dialogues to test speaking, listening skills were not mentioned*. These following assessments seemly leave some valuable commentary such as there is a risk that the types of tasks and tests described may not be the best in terms of motivating and stimulating young learners, the assessment might be cognitively beyond young learners, and probably these tasks could be boring for young learners and may affect their enjoyment of learning English. In addition, teachers should consider about some ways to assess young learners' academic process and language mastery, deals with assessment instruments that are used with young English language learners, and also discuss some new trends in the

assessment of the language and academic attainment of young English language learners.

In addition, McKay (2006) proposes classroom assessment include the following ones. Teachers assess learners at the start of the year to identify student's strengths and weakness. During the year teachers can use the results of tests to help teachers make decisions about what to teach next and what we need to revise. Teachers are able to collect some information about children to share with parents, and of course with the children themselves. Teachers use assessments to provide evidence of student progress. These assessments can be required by local authorities and teachers must base their assessments on a local or national curriculum. Classroom assessment can also be summative. Children can be given a mark or a grade at the end of the school year.

Furthermore, in assessing four language skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening probably are difficult one for teachers to find interesting and age-appropriate tasks which integrated the four skills. Even more, teachers tend to use the same activities to assess young learners both as individual skills and together. Based on McKay (2006) in the research of University of Huddersfield proposes types of four skills assessment tasks for young learners such as **oral assessment** task for young learners in which young learner speaking can be assessed using the techniques like *news telling* which involves children telling other children what they have done recently. It may be done in a whole class setting, in a small group or in partners. This task assesses children's ability to do this in a way that conveys information to the audience with adequate detail, in an appropriate sequence. The abilities of children in the audience to listen critically for detail, and to generate questions can be assessed.

Children's ability to tell a story can be assessed with the use of illustrations cut away and laminated into a book. It is best to show the entire sequence of the pictures first, and ask for the story, because if children tell the story from page to page, they tend to treat each picture as a separate unit, losing the sense of the connected story in their storytelling. For example, the children could divide pictures of animals into two groups – those which hibernate and those do not. These tasks can integrate learning from other school lessons such as science. Oral presentation which can be supported with pictures or objects.

In the case of listening assessment tasks, teaching English for young learners can be implied by using the following techniques covering listen-and-do, action task, and TPR task. In this case, the responding through actions, the responses are non-verbal and minimal. Children could be asked to draw something or build something. The responses are more complicated than those elicited through listen-and-do tasks. The prompts in these tasks are requests or commands. The requests can be simple, such as “stand up and then sit down”. Or they can be composed of a series of more complicated instructions. In doing these techniques, the teachers can be used the following question types for assessing listening such as: *True/false tasks, noting down specific information, completing grids and charts, matching tasks, aural cloze, and spot the mistake*. Reading assessment tasks for young learners are implied by using these techniques such as *read-and-do tasks, reading and retelling, read-and-do tasks requiring a short written answer, reading and picture-matching, reading and completing chart-information transfer*. Writing assessment tasks for young learners can be done by the following techniques: *writing in response to a picture, completing a story, and re-forming a text*.

CONCLUSION

However, in assessing young learners, the teacher also consider about the characteristics of assessment instruments used because language or tests can be good or poor. According to Gordon (2007), there are some of the criteria that dermine reliability of assessment instruments meant for young language learners include the language test which has clear directions. It should tell language learners what exactly they need to do in simple, clear, unambiguous language. The test is made of tasks that are free of ambiguity and easy to interpret. The print and graphic materials are user-friendly; its pages do not look overcrowded; its graphics are lean, simple, and attractive. The language test is neither too short nor too long. (If the test contains too few tasks, students might get an inaccurately low score by inadvertently getting just one answer wrong or an inaccurately high score by accidentally getting just one answer right). The well-made assessment instrument also has provisions for reliable scoring. By providing scoring rubrics and unambiguous scoring

guidelines, it enables the test reader to interpret test results accurately and to assign correct scores to test takers.

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