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Early Childhood Teachers' Ability in Pronouncing Vocabularies

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ABSTRACT

Problems for learners of English as Foreign Language may appear due to the lack of English mastery of the teachers. Since teachers are regarded as input for language learning, it impacts the students' achievement. Pronunciation is one of the problems faced by both Indonesian teachers and students. When the teachers give the correct pronunciation, it results in the correct pronunciation of the students. On the other hand, the wrong pronunciation of the teachers will impact the students' incorrect pronunciation. This study is aimed to reveal the early childhood teachers' ability in pronouncing English vocabulary. The findings of the study are to determine the appropriate treatment which might be needed to overcome the problems. The subject of the study were 40 randomly selected early childhood teachers. The data were collected by testing their vocabulary mastery and pronunciation ability. The result of the study showed that the English mastery of early childhood teachers was needed to be developed for less ability in pronouncing the vocabulary correctly. The questionnaires also implied that the teachers need improvement in dealing with English.

INTRODUCTION

English as the global language is also introduced on early childhood education as extracurricular. As Foreign Language, in which English is not used in daily activities, it will be difficult for

children to be familiar with English. In ensuring the achievement of learning English, the teaching and learning process must be conducted in an attractive method. Moreover, the teachers have to master the English vocabulary, especially spoken language since almost the early childhood students have less ability in reading.

Pronunciation is an essential part of English since different pronunciation will impact on different meaning. For English language learners, it necessary to give attention to pronunciation aspect. A reasearch finding conducted by Bakar and Abdullah (2015) also indicated that students had possitive attitude towards the importance of correct pronunciation in spoken English; and it was recomended that teachers enhance leaners' awareness on the importance of acquiring correct pronunciation. Mispronunciation has become the concern in EFL for it may lead to miscommunication, misunderstanding and misperception among participants of communication (Silalahi, 2016).

In fact, environment influence EFL learners input, and the most influential are their school environment. As a common practice , they listen and use their English during the class; especially, they learn how to pronounce their words by listening to their teachers. So, when they listen the incorrect pronunciation, they will have the wrong pronunciation. A research conducted by Silalahi (2016) found that there were four reasons for pronunciation problems of Indonesian EFL learners, which was found that the problem of students' mispronunciation was affected by the imitation of the wrong pronunciation from their teachers.

The research conducted in this study was based on several previous studies as the theoretical framework. The main point underlying this research was related to English for young learners. Teaching English for young learners, especially for early childhood students, should be introduced early for it is a golden age in which everything can be absorbed quickly and easily. As regard to language acquisition theory (Ellis, 1997), young learners may learn language faster than adult, as they are believed to undergo a critical period of acquiring language. Ellis (1997:67) stated that there is a

period during which language is easy to complete, and it is assumed to be up to 12 years old. The works of filtering processor for second language acquisition on children, there is only a slight, if not none, filtering process.

In understanding the language, vocabulary is crucial to be mastered (Alqahtani, 2015). For foreign language learners, vocabulary plays an important role in which it links the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing all together. In mastering English skills, students must know the vocabulary of the language i.e. a list of words with their meaning because it supports their skills' improvement (Linse, 2005 on Bakhs, 2016). Meanwhile, dealing with vocabulary does not only relate to the letters, but also deals with the true sounds, i.e pronunciation.

It is difficult for Indonesian students to pronounce English words correctly due to the difference between their mother tongue and English as the target language. Teachers play an important role as facilitator and model for students. Thus, it is necessary for teachers to have capability in pronouncing well so that they can give the correct pronunciation to students. According to Tsang (2017), the teachers who cannot speak English well, will not be convincing to use English with the students. Teachers would be the one to model the correct pronunciation to the children so that they will learn to pronounce the words correctly.

Due to the onset of communicative approach in language teaching, particularly in relation to the teaching and learning English, teachers have generally place minimal emphasize on the importance of pronunciation (Celce Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwind, 1996 on Bakar & Abdullah, 2015). A study conducted by Yani (2012) found that teachers' incorrect pronunciation affect on young learners' performance for the wrong input given by the teachers.

The other problem faced by Indonesian learners is affected by the qualification of the teachers. In fact, there are many English teachers have less ability in mastering English. Furthermore, in early childhood education, those who teach English are the early childhood teacher who do not have English education background.

According to such reality, many young learners could not get the English competence well. Proficient teachers are important as it is one of the factors influencing the language acquisition (Richard in Mustafa, et.al 2018). Early childhood teachers who could not accomodate children with adequate English mastery will face difficulty to carry out the language learning process.

Mustafa, et.al (2018) found there were some aspects dealing with the challenges faced by early childhood teachers to teach English; they were: lack of English proficiency, lack of interest, attitude toward English language, lack of self confidence, unsupported culture. The two main points elaborated according to the aspect of the lack of English proficiency were pronunciation and lack of vocabulary.

Learners, especially early childhood students, are very sensitive to receive various stimuli provided by the environment. Thus, the input given by the teachers will impact on their performance. This study is aimed to analyze early childhood teachers' ability in pronouncing English vocabulary. The findings of the research will be used as the source in determining the next step, whether it is necessary to give any treatment or training for teachers or not. The result, then, is to improve the ability of the early childhood teachers to make students familiarize with the correct English pronunciation.

METHODS

The research is aimed to investigate the early childhood teachers' ability in pronouncing English vocabulary. The research was conducted with 40 teachers from different kindergatens in Wonosobo as the sample. Test was one of the instrument used to collect the data and information needed in the study. It was intended to find out the teachers performance. Specifically, the tests were used to find out the teachers performance in terms of vocabulary and pronunciation.

In collecting the data, the researchers needed instrument. The use of valid instrument is very essential to determine the

validity of data. The instruments that were applied in this study were test and questionnaire. Test can be defined as a set of techniques, procedures, or items of measuring a person ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain (Brown, 2004:3). Meanwhile, Wilson and McLean (1994) on Cohen et.al (2007:317) state that questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structure, often numerical data, being able to be administered without the presence of the researcher, and often being comparatively straightforward to analyze.

In this study, the test was conducted by asking the teachers to pronounce 35 list of words. The vocabularies given to them were basic vocabularies for early childhood students. The test itself was divided into 2 forms, they were vocabulary mastery and pronunciation skill. The teachers were asked to mention the vocabulary of the pictures showed to them with correct pronunciation. The sounds, then, were recorded and transcribed to measure the result as the data collection method. And in addition, questionnaire consisted of 5 questions related to the topic provided were also given to them. The questionnaire itself was needed as the additional information to reveal the early childhood teachers' perceptions particularly with regard to the importance of English for early childhood students. It was also to determine the next step taken by the researchers related to the problems faced by the teachers dealing with English vocabulary and pronunciation mastery.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After conducting the test and giving the questionnaire, the researchers analyzed the result. The aim of determining the score was to found out the average ability in performing English. The following table showed the range of score gotten by teachers in vocabulary mastery and pronunciation skill.

Table 1. Table of Vocabulary and Pronunciation Test Result

No	List of Words	Scoring		Percentage (%)	
		Vocab	Pronun	Vocab	Pronun
1.	Eye	31	26	77.5	65
2.	Nose	32	30	80	75
3.	Mouth	29	24	72.5	60
4.	Head	31	29	77.5	72.5
5.	Ear	26	19	65	47.5
6.	Teeth	32	30	80	75
7.	Arm	30	30	75	75
8.	Foot	35	31	87.5	77.5
9.	Leg	27	22	76.5	55
10.	Giraffe	20	12	50	30
11.	Leopard	14	4	35	10
12.	Cat	35	35	87.5	87.5
13.	Parrot	25	15	62.5	73.5
14.	Bear	21	11	52.5	27.5
15.	Blue	35	35	87.5	87.5
16.	Yellow	33	33	82.5	82.5
17.	Purple	24	15	60	37.5
18.	Watermelon	33	25	82.5	62.5
19.	Grape	24	18	60	45
20.	Banana	37	27	92.5	67.5
21.	Avocado	28	12	70	30
22.	Tomato	34	25	85	62.5
23.	Onion	24	10	60	25
24.	Chili	29	10	72.5	25
25.	Cauliflowers	16	6	40	15
26.	Potato	26	14	65	35
27.	Radish	15	9	37.5	22.5
28.	Spinach	35	17	87.5	42.5
29.	Lettuce	5	3	12.5	7.5
30.	Sweet Potato	33	20	82.5	50
	Average	27.3	19.9	63	44.6

The result showed that the lowest score was found in “lettuce” word in both vocabulary mastery and pronunciation, they were 5 score and 3 score. It means that only 12.5% and 7.5% of the teachers could mention and pronounce the word correctly. On the other hand, the highest score, which fell on 37 point, was found in “banana” word in vocabulary mastery. It implied that there were 37 teachers or 92.5% were able to mention the word correctly. However, in pronunciation skill, the highest score was found in “cat” in which 35 point was gotten or 87.5% of the students. The average score for vocabulary mastery and pronunciation skill were 27.3 and 19.9 or 63% and 44.6% among the 40 teachers.

From the findings above, it revealed that the teachers were able to mention the common words in English. They, however, had less ability in pronounce the words correctly. It was shown in “banana” word, in which 37 teachers were able to mention the correct vocabulary, but only 27 of the teachers were able to pronounce it correctly. In “lettuce” word, on the contrary, which was uncommon word, 5 teachers could perform the correct vocabulary mastery and only 3 among 40 teachers pronouncing it well.

In order to gain information related to the teachers’ perception towards the importance of English for early childhood students, the researchers distributed questionnaire to the teachers after conducting the test. In analyzing the questionnaire, the researchers used the following formula:

$$P = \frac{f}{N} \times 100\%$$

Where:

P = Percentage

f = frequency

N = the number of sample

100% = constant value

Furthermore, the result of questionnaire question would be elaborated in detail in the following table:

Table 2. Table of Questionnaire Result

No.	Question Number	Frequency				Percentage			
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1.	1			16	24			40%	60%
2.	2			20	20			50%	50%
3.	3	5	20	15		12.5%	50%	37.5%	
4.	4			17	23			42.5%	57.5%
5.	5			15	25			37.5%	62.5%

The following were the list detail questions given on the questionnaire form:

1. Do you agree if English is introduced on early childhood education?
2. Do you think that early childhood teachers should master the English vocabulary?
3. As an early childhood teacher, do you think that you have good ability in teaching English in the classroom?
4. Do you think that an English training for early childhood teachers is important to be conducted?
5. Do you agree to join the English training for early childhood teachers?

Meanwhile, the scoring was elaborated as follows:

1. 1 = strongly disagree
2. 2 = disagree
3. 3 = agree
4. 4 = strongly agree

From the questionnaire, it showed that 16 respondents or 40% of the samples were agree that English should be introduced on early childhood education; and the rest of them, they were 24 participants or 60% of them, stated that they were strongly agree.

The result of the questionnaire also found that 50% of the respondents were agree and 50% of them were strongly agree that early childhood teachers should also have English vocabulary mastery. On the other hand, they realized that they have less ability in English. The findings showed that 12.5% had no ability and 50% of the respondents had less ability in English vocabulary mastery; and only 37.5% of them had enough ability. Based on the questionnaire, 42.5% were agree and 57.5% were strongly agree that the need of English training for early childhood teachers was necessary. And in addition, 37.5% were agree and 62.5% were strongly agree in case of their participation on English training for early childhood teachers.

Based on the questionnaire findings, it implies that for teachers it is important to introduce English in early age since young learners might learn language faster than adult. It is clear that teachers as facilitator for language learning should have a good competence for it impacted on the learners' performance. However, in fact, teachers still have less ability in English mastery, particularly in pronunciation aspect. Thus, the teachers are needed to be encouraged to improve their ability in English mastery. And surprisingly, most of the teachers have awareness of how to improve their competence by joining English training.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study is to find out the teachers performance in vocabulary mastery and pronunciation skill in the early childhood classroom. Since teachers ability will impact on children output performance, the teachers should give the good input for them. Based on the result of the data analysis, it reveals that the English mastery of the early childhood teachers are needed to be improved. In fact, the teachers have less ability in pronouncing the vocabulary correctly. The questionnaires also implies that they realize that they need improvement dealing with English. Thus, it can be concluded that it is necessary to provide any training of English for young learner mastery for early childhood teachers.

After conducting the study, then, the researchers are planning to design any short course to be delivered to the early childhood teachers in order to help the early childhood teachers to improve their English competence.

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