

ON TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TO PRIMARY CLASS STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English in primary schools relates to the readiness of the schools and the students' proficiency levels. If the schools have the sufficiency of English teachers, media, and textbooks, they will be ready to teach English. It is because primary schools deal with young learners aged 6-12 years and this period is believed as the best moment to gain knowledge. It is in line with the basic principle stating that young learners can learn English better. Teaching English in primary schools provides both benefits and challenges. The benefits are reported by Moon, Singleton, and Read, and the problems are pointed by Copland, et al., Khamari et al., and Wei-pei. Regarding the issue, this article identifies the benefits and challenges based on theories and research findings and then proposes several solutions of the difficulties which can be the references for the schools to provide high-quality English teaching and learning.

Keywords: *teaching English in primary schools, benefits, challenges, solutions*

INTRODUCTION

English in Indonesia becomes one of the foreign languages that are taught in the schools besides local and national languages. However, it is only considered a local content subject, which means that the schools have their right to teach English or not by taking into account their local needs and regional condition. In the past, English was not learnt in the primary school level, but then English is considered essential for several purposes, such as science, technology, culture, and the like. Therefore, the Indonesian government decides to include English in the primary school's curriculum, known as curriculum 1994, curriculum 2004, and curriculum 2006 or it is called as School-Based Curriculum. In Indonesia, only several primary schools teach English to their students. For example, in Yogyakarta, there are only 67 out of 166 primary schools that teach English to the students (*Dinas Pendidikan, Pemuda, dan Olahraga Provinsi DIY*, 2017). It shows that the number of primary schools teaching English has not reached half the number of primary schools, so the level of English language teaching readiness in the primary schools has not been encouraging enough. Teaching English in primary schools means teaching students aged 6-12 years, regarded as young learners. As they are still young, they will come to the class with different levels of English knowledge. They may come with excellent English; the others may know nothing about English at all. This condition causes a difference among students'

motivation in learning English. Some of them feel that English is easy and enjoyable, and others think that English is difficult and tedious. Furthermore, the students who are very interested in English need to be facilitated to experience an appropriate English lesson, while they who are not interested in learning English need to be motivated and supported more by showing that English is exciting and fun. Consequently, if the schools have appropriate facilities, such as English books, media, and competent teachers, they can facilitate and support the students well to learn English.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

It can be concluded that teaching English in primary schools must have many challenges. English can be profitable and destructive for young learners. It might be beneficial if the activities are exciting and related to young learners' life. It will also make them willing to learn English. In contrast, it can be destructive if the activities are not fun and related to young learners' life. Hence, it will make them dislike learning English.

Along with that statement, several studies in the area of teaching English in primary schools have been conducted. They are in the case of textbooks, English teachers, parents' awareness, students' social status, students' interest, and so on. From these phenomena, the statement saying that there are many problems and challenges in teaching English in primary schools is true. Therefore, providing the solutions can help the schools to solve those problems that may happen in the real implementation of English teaching-learning processes at schools. The answers can be obtained by giving training for English teachers, educating parents that English is fundamental, motivating the students with attractive teaching materials, and the like. As many challenges happen in teaching English in primary schools, these issues need more attention to be analyzed. Therefore, several research questions are proposed; What are the benefits of teaching English in primary schools?, What are the challenges in teaching English in primary schools?, And what are solutions of the problems in teaching English in primary schools? Therefore, the research aims are to identify the benefits and challenges in teaching English in primary schools and to find out the solutions related to the problems. Before discussing further the benefits and the challenges in teaching English in primary schools, the writers show several theories and studies which support that learning a foreign language at an early age is better. "Children between three and six years of age are at the optimal age for learning foreign languages, because, when children learn their first language, they can use the same method to learn foreign languages". Besides, the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) claims that there is a biological timetable for foreign language acquisition which can be done more optimally. Consequently, if it is acquired after the optimal period, it will become more challenging to learn the language. The optimal period is 2-14 years of age . It means

that more than 14 years of age or adults will have more challenges when they learn English. In another reference, most schools start teaching a foreign language to the students at the age of 8–9. They believe that in those ages, learners will not fail to learn a foreign language because it is the best period to gain knowledge from the teacher.

Furthermore, “pre-school children have brains which are more active, connected, and flexible than adults’ ”. It means that children like to move and play, are creative and imaginative, and have an excellent social skill. Thus, the English teaching and learning process in class will be more successful if English teachers take into account their learners’ needs and can identify the learners’ backgrounds such as environment, culture, and interest. Teaching English in primary schools includes one that needs to be underlined. It is because it deals with young learners who have unique characteristics. Several characteristics of young learners are egocentric, imaginative and active, self-centered, get bored easily, and find difficulties to differentiate the concrete and abstract things; they also have a low concentration level, prefer to do their task by themselves, and love to learn new things. They learn by doing to acquire a new language.

Teaching English in primary schools has several purposes. They are categorized into two major parts, such as interaction and socialization. The aims of interaction are to help children to acquire and use information, like learning how to spell; to help children to acquire other physical skills, such as cutting, handwriting; and help children to acquire complex skills such as reading. Meanwhile, the purposes of socialization are to help children to recognize a wider society, and enable them to mingle with their peers and to work with them. For example, the activities in the class can be done through working in pairs, playing games, singing a song, and the like.

In addition, young learners acquire a language effectively and efficiently if the environment supports them. They will learn through their experiences and activities. It means that they explore their backgrounds and skills to acquire a language more easily because they directly interact with them. As mentioned previously, children also like to make physical movements, so that fun activities such as playing games, singing songs, storytelling, role- playing, and so on can be recommended exercises to help young learners pick up the target language quickly. Other fun learning activities that can be applied by teachers to teach English for young learners can also be found in other references, and so on. They propose fun activities like “Get together activities, spider mobile, the giant potato story, learning diaries, matching, and so on.”

The next discussion is the main idea of the study mentioned previously. It is the benefits of teaching English in primary schools, challenges, and the solutions of the

issues. These ideas are collected from several studies on the teaching of English in primary schools.

In short, English teachers for young learners need to know habit, characteristics, and learners' needs in order to be able to improve their competencies and teaching performance. In addition, open-minded thought, willingness to ask, reading habit, and curiosity to open a dictionary will make them professional in their expertise, especially teaching primary students.

CONCLUSION

In addition, the next study under the same issue is expected to be able to measure or to analyze within a broader context. It is because the researchers realize that this study has a few preliminary studies under the same issue to know further the benefits and challenges in teaching English to primary students. Therefore, the solutions provided are not yet sufficient. Thus, the use of more comprehensive methods and both quantitative and qualitative approaches can be one of the suggestions to have broader and more explicit findings. Survey studies may be used to explore the perceptions of stakeholders who get involved in the development of teaching English in primary schools. Another research could be an ethnographic observation study which may be used to explore the actual practices of teaching English in primary schools, not only in the big city but also in the rural area.

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