

Kindergarten Future Teacher's Perception on Teaching English to Young Learners through Thematic-based Instruction

Desiani Natalina Muliastari, Endah Silawati, and Winti Ananthia
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Kampus di Cibiru, Jl. Raya Cibiru, Bandung, Indonesia
{desianinm, endah_silawati, winti}@upi.edu

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Abstract: This study is a part of on-going research that focuses on the empowering kindergarten future teachers in teaching EYL. The article aims at exploring the future teachers' perception during teaching EYL to kindergarten students through theme-based Instruction. It describes the future teachers' challenges and strengths. Theme-based Instruction is one of the learning activities that drives holistically and meaningfully. This is a qualitative study that involved eight participants of Future Teachers of Kindergarten. The results show that the future teachers found difficulties in giving English instruction, managing class and applying learning media. On the other hand, the study shows that the future teachers have potential skill to teach EYL though they are non English major students.

1 INTRODUCTION

In facing globalization era, it is highly recommended for an individual to have English competency in order to participate and compete in global society. English is considered important in a more globalized era as one of indicators for personal and professional capabilities in the 21st century (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). It is believed that English should be introduced as earlier as possible specifically starting from children as they are in their phase of acquiring the language (Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke, 2000; Clarke, 2009). Consequently, some parents who realize the importance of English for their children's future success request the teaching of English to be started in the preschool level (Ananthia, Harun & Silawati, 2015). Therefore, some of early childhood educational institutions offer English as one of their learning subjects, though in Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum, both Ministry Regulation (Permen) No. 58 year 2009 and 2015 ECE curriculum contend that English learning is not compulsory to be introduced to children in preschool and kindergarten.

Learning English gives access to children to learn not only the language but also foreign cultural appreciation (Musthafa, 2001). The children will then improve their international understanding, such as tolerance, cultural diversity and peace (Reich in

UNESCO 1994) as one of the skills needed in 21st century.

Because of that, introducing English as a foreign language in early years should be done correctly and effectively. The children are best in imitating and absorbing new language. Thus, the teacher should have the skills of teaching English to children especially teaching English as a foreign language in the Indonesian context. Recent study shows that most of kindergarten teachers do not have skills of teaching English to Young Learners (Harun & ananthia, 2013). The teachers were not prepared to teach EYL during their studies. Meanwhile, EYL practices needs teachers who are able to integrate their English language ability and their pedagogical skill (Rahman & Akhter, 2017). Therefore, It is a must to prepare future teachers to be skillful in teaching English to young learners.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) study program of UPI Cibiru Campus is one of the institutions in Indonesia that educates the future teachers of ECE. According to the employer's satisfaction survey of ECE study program graduates, conducted by the Unit of quality control in 2011-2016, the graduates have low EYL teaching skills. Consequently, the quality of ECE study program should be improved by conducting research in the study program courses, especially the course titled *Bahasa Inggris untuk Anak Usia Dini (English for Young Learners)*. Moreover, based on the

preliminary study, it was found that all teachers in four Kindergartens in Bandung taught English without clear concept and objectives. Most teachers taught English by translating the English words into mother tongue (Bahasa Indonesia) or vice versa.

On the other hand, one of the EYL learning models assumed to be effective in the context of foreign language learning is Theme-Based Instruction (TBI) model. It is one of the language learning models that highlights themes as the center of learning (Gao, 2011; Dermody, 2004). This model is suitable in EYL context in the kindergarten since their learning activities are organized into themes and it is in line with the Early Childhood curriculum 2013 in Indonesia. The 2013 curriculum states that theme is the basic concept of developing children activities in early childhood education (Permendikbud, 2013).

In implementing TBI model, the teacher could face some challenges. Therefore, their perception is important to be analyzed as the basis data for the improvement. This article will picture the teachers' perceptions on teaching EYL through TBI model.

2 THEORITICAL REVIEW

2.1 Teaching English to Young Learners (EYL)

English is taught to the children based on the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) in which every child has a golden phase of life, when the child is exposed to a particular language, the language would be acquired/learnt successfully, including the second language (Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2002; Phillips, 1993). In addition, children are faster learners than adults in learning foreign language (Santrock, 2007). Those assumptions are in line with the study proposed by Johnson and Newport in 1991 which saw that immigrants from China and Korea who lived in Amerika from the age of 3 to 7 years had good English performance than teenagers or adults (Santrock, 2007).

To teach children a second language requires integrated skills; language and pedagogical skills. There are some considerations that may help give some practical approaches in teaching children, namely, intellectual development, attention span, sensory input, affective factors and authentic meaningful language (Brown, 2001). The teacher should comprehend these factors in managing effective learning activities

2.2 Thematic Based Instruction in EYL

The Theme-Based Instruction model is one of language learning models that highlight themes as the centre of learning (Gao, 2011; Dermody, 2004). This model could be implementing in language learning in which connecting the learning context in to themes (Brown, 2011). This model is suitable for EYL context in kindergarten where learning is organised into themes. Learning the language should also be mediated through language use (Gibbons, 2003) based on the themes.

The main aspects of this model are automaticity, meaningful learning, intrinsic motivation and communicative competence (Brown, 2001). These aspects are in line with the EYL basic concepts. This can be assumed that this model is effective in EYL practices. It is hoped by improving the course, the future teachers' EYL teaching skills can be also improved.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design in regard to the consideration that the researcher focused on the observing, interpreting, and understanding what the future teachers experienced. The participants of the study were eight future teachers of *Bahasa Inggris untuk Anak Usia Dini* (English for Young Learners) class. The data was collected through observation and questionnaire. The observation was conducted to observe the future teachers' activities during their teaching practice. The open ended questionnaire was employed to explore the future teachers' perception of teaching English to young learners and their teaching practices. The observation was recorded. And the data from observation and questionnaire were analysed qualitatively to answer the research questions addressed in the study. The analysis triangulated all data needed. The data were interpreted, reviewed, and discussed.

4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Future Teachers' Challenges

The data from the questionnaire and observation revealed that there were some challenges that should be faced and overcome by the future teachers. Those challenges were first, low confidence in speaking English. The data showed that the future teachers

were not confident (Ahn, 2011) when they were required to have full English in teaching the children. All the future teachers admitted that they were really inconfident in delivering the activities in English. The future teachers described that they were very nervous and easily forgot what to say in English. The data also showed that they needed to be motivated and had practiced a lot especially practicing their pronunciation. For example, most future teachers pronounced the word “answer” or “banana” as it was written or pronounce as mother tongue. As the teacher who use English as the language of instruction thus they needed to practice all the time as they were going to be the role model (Archana & Usha Rani, 2017).

Second, the future teachers found difficulties in giving English instruction. Out of eight future teachers, seven of them stated that they had difficulties in giving English Instruction. They did not get used to have English instructions. Moreover, the children of “A” kindergarten were never experienced learning English with English as language of instruction. This situation made the future teachers struggle a lot. Thus the future teachers were managed to have simple instructions of English to make the children get used to and understand English instruction. The future teachers acknowledged that they needed to repeat many times and recast (Gibbons, 2003; Baleghizadeh & Heidar Abdi, 2010) a word or an order to have the children understand. Once, the future teacher also claimed that they did not realize they uttered the mother tongue/ Bahasa Indonesia when they were trying to let the students know something or when they were ordering the students. For example:

Future teacher: Okay children...come on look at the story in LCD. *Sudah?*

Children: *Sudaaaah.*

Third, managing class. Class management is important and essential especially when teachers are dealing with children (Rahman & Akhter, 2017). It is challenging as the children have short attention span (Paxton & Shoemake, 2007; Brown, 2001). Five future teachers were having difficulties in managing the class in certain situations. The future teachers explained that there were some children who wanted to sit near the LCD projector as they wanted to play with it. Though the teacher had managed them to sit little bit away from the LCD projector but they were going back several times. Other children showed “picky” friends. It means that they did not want to have a group with certain friends. Another child was busy with her squishy toys and she influenced her

friends to play it too. It needed the future teachers' strategy to manage the children and to have them focus on the activities. They were challenged to deal with this kind of situations and they learnt classroom management application.

Fourth, applying learning media. Learning media is very important for teachers because it helps the learning process of the children. Four future teachers were having obstacles in applying the media. They found that the learning media was less interesting for the children though it was colourful (Rao, 2014) and two of the future teachers realised that they were lack of the media. So they tended to repeat the video playing and it made the children bored.

Fifth, the future teachers also found difficulties in creating assessment tool to measure the children's English based on the theme based instruction. Most of the teachers described that they had the difficulties in creating the assessment tools and activities. They had learned and practiced on how to asses the children's English ability but they found difficulties in applying the assessment in the real situation. For example, one future teacher showed that she wanted to assess the children pronunciation. So she drilled all students at one time for three words. It took too much time and made the other children bored and played with other children. Drilling was not appropriate technique in assessing the students' pronunciation. Drilling is contradictory with the concept of authentic assessment (Gullo, 2005).

The five challenges showed from the data are compared in the chart below. It can be seen that the most challenging factor emerged from the future teachers is low of confidence. The second challenging factor are giving English instructions and creating assessment. Managing class is the next challenging factor , and Learning media is the last challenging factor.

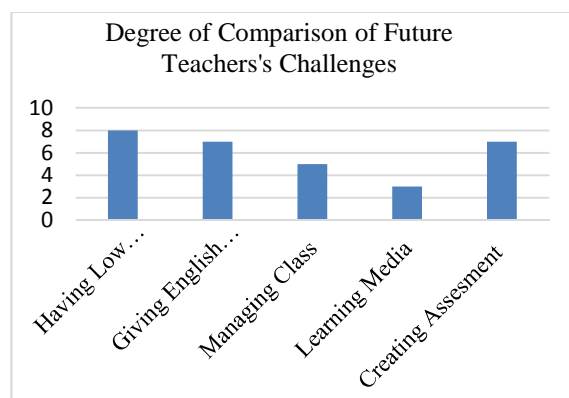


Figure 1: Future Teachers' Challenges.

4.2 Future Teachers' Strengths

The future teachers were having their first experience in teaching English to kindergarten children. Though they are non English major students but they have potential skills to teach EYL. The first of their potential skills is that they understood the Thematic Based Instruction. The future teachers prepared their lesson plan, material, media including the teacher's talk based on the theme that the children were going to learn. Though they needed to correct the lesson plan and teachers' talks several times but they performed it well. Most of them were succeeded in applying the activities as planned. They easily understand how to create activities based on the theme as they had background knowledge of the Thematic Based Instructions. The future teachers explained that they also learnt TBI from other subjects and from the Early Childhood national curriculum of 2013

Second, the use of the media. Some of the future teachers (four future teachers) presented colorful and interesting media (Rao, 2014). They also brought the real media such as real fruits, real food, etc to construct meaning and understanding of the children (VanScoter, 2001; Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008). The future teachers also prepared the used materials to make something such as bus miniature from used cardboard. They also integrated ICT in the activities, and it triggered the childrens' attention to involve in the activities.

The third potential skill is various teaching techniques. The future teachers applied kinds of activities such as the use of Total Physical Response (Chen, 2010; Brown, 2001) through games or exercises such as doing exercises when the theme is my body. Another activity was hands-on experiences (Cutter- Mackenzie.et.al, 2014) such as smelling, touching and tasting the food or fruit. The future teachers also applied song as learning techniques to overcome boredom and they integrated the indoor and outdoor activities.

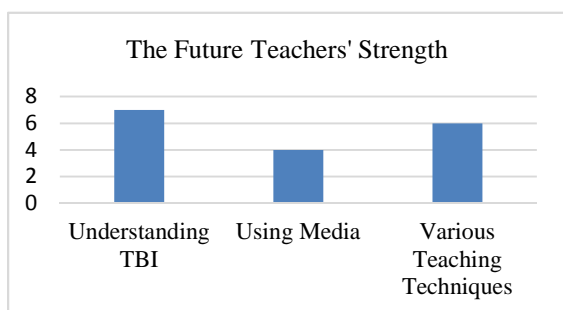


Figure 2: Future Teachers' Strengths.

The data of the chart shows that the future teachers' strengths mostly on their understanding of the Theme-Based Instruction followed by the various techniques in applying TBI and the use of colourful and various media. The findings of the this study shows that the future teachers need more efforts to develop their potential skills. They are able to always practice English in order to overcome the challenges they face. Competent users of a language are able to use the language in real-life. The data also motivated the researchers to have more efforts in preparing the future teachers in teaching EYL. The future teachers have their potential skill to be developed and they have chances to be better.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The future teachers are prepared to face the reality in teaching English to young learners. It was their first experience in teaching English to young learners and they found challenges and also strengths. The challenges were low of confidence of the future teachers, difficulties in giving English instruction, managing class, creating learning media, and creating assessment. The strengths shown from the data were the future teachers' understanding of the Thematic-Based Instruction, the use of the media, and the variations of teaching techniques. After the teaching session all teachers reflected their planning, the action and also their assessment. The important things that should be noted from the findings are further efforts to prepare the future teachers in overcoming the real situations. The future teachers should have many practices and motivate themselves to be confident.

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