

VARIOUS ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract: Teaching English to young learners has become a trend nowadays. In some schools, English has been taught as a local content subject. Teaching young learners is not like teaching adults because children have their own way of learning. Young learners need to feel secure and know that there are some obvious reasons for learning English. Therefore, teachers have to motivate them to learn as much as possible in order to be able to communicate fluently using English. Since children like to play and have fun, the learning and teaching process should be suitable with the characteristics of the children themselves. Various forms of fun activities for children are important for their learning and development. This paper will discuss various activities in teaching young learners which could enhance their language skills.

Keyword: English for young learners, fun and active learning, teaching strategies

The importance of English as a world language has made people to learn English as early as possible. In Indonesia for example, English is taught as a local content subject in elementary school. Local content subject might be provided if the local community considered that subject proficiency was needed by the pupils (Huda, 1999). The statement above was then legalized in the Decree of the Ministry of Education and Culture (R.I./No.0487/4/1992, Chapter VIII) that stated that an elementary school could add some extra lessons in its curriculum as long as they were not in contradiction with the objectives of national education.

In addition some private kindergartens or playgroups provide some English classes for their students. This is supported by the fact that the optimum age for children to learn a foreign language is when they are still in a very young age. Because of this fact, Teaching English to Young Learners, TEYL, becomes increasingly famous. Therefore, there are many English courses and publication of the course book to support this phenomenon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Young Learners

Before we go on, it is better to look at the definition of young learners in order for us to have same perspective and knowledge. The definition of Young Learners is children between the ages of 5 years old to 12 years old (Rixon, 1999), while according Cameron (2001); young learners are those under 14 years old. Moreover, the definition of young learners is mainly based on the years spent on primary or elementary schools of formal education before they go to secondary schools. Some psycholinguists say that one of the factors to support in language learning is young age. There are some explanations for better learning at young age. First, the brain is more adaptable before puberty, and that acquisition of languages is possible without self-consciousness at an early age and also because young children have more opportunities than adults. The children are learning all the time without having the worries and responsibility of adults (Cameron, 2001)

Learning a second language (L2) especially English in multilingual environments is not easy. In multilingual settings established patterns of communication may lead to the foreign tongue (English) being seen as an 'intruder' in the already established interaction system, especially amongst children. Literacy practices may appear complex due to unequal relationships between different languages (Asfaha & Kroon, 2011) and contextual compromise in standard language use (Pitt, 2005) leading to adaptation and mixing of languages.

Children sometimes have difficulties in learning English. Although they have prior knowledge of the words in their first language, to learn a new language is not easy. They find it difficult to spell, pronounce, and write the words correctly since the words differ from their native language both in spelling and pronunciation. The condition of teaching and learning activities commonly occurs in learner-centered teaching not learning centered perspective. In order to get children involved in the language class and to ensure a natural anxiety-free language learning environment certain techniques could be applied. According to Halliwell (1992) the teachers have to provide them with occasion when: (1) they

find some way that make them comfort to communicate, and (2) they have desire to construct language actively.

One of the best ways of getting children drawn in the language class is through fun activities. That is why various fun activities in teaching English so useful and so important. It is not just because they are fun or not boring; it is partly because the fun elements create a desire to communicate and partly because those activities can create unpredictability (Halliwell, 1992).

Various Activities in Teaching Young Learners

There are so many activities that can be applied in a classroom. In this paper, I just include three activities: using stories, using songs, using drama, and using games because these four activities are very common and easy to do in the classroom.

Using Stories

Everybody is familiar with story. A majority of people used to listen to stories and like them very much. Children want to enjoy a character's adventures and like to distinguish between good and evil.

Žigárdyová (2006) stated that using stories in the learning process could be the most natural way how to practice skills like speaking, listening, writing and learn pronunciation and new vocabulary.

In choosing a story a teacher should carefully consider whether it is interesting, motivating, and suitable for young learners, and whether all activities give learners an opportunity to develop their language skills.

After choosing a good story, the teacher can read it for the students or the students can read their own stories. Then the students can share their stories orally or in written to their friends by using their own words. These activities not only improve their reading, listening, speaking and writing skills but also enhance their vocabulary mastery and pronunciation.

Using Songs

Children love to sing. By using songs young learners learn how to incorporate effectively into English lessons as good practice for learning pronunciation and vocabulary (Yuliana, 2006).

Through songs make the children learn the language unconsciously, and in a fun way. The activity is not only lead to the fun activity of the children but also the skills' development of the students.

Teachers can choose a good song by themselves or they can choose a song based on the students' request. When the songs are introduced; the first skill that the children learn is listening. The second skill that the children can learn through songs is speaking skills. Singing a song, however simple, is a pleasing achievement. After the children listen to the song, they would attempt to sing it. In this section, they can practice how to pronounce the words well and get new vocabulary.

After the children learn to listen and speak the words, it is now the time for the children to learn to write. The activity that can be used to enhance the children writing skills is dictation. The children are given a short and slow song, and then the teachers ask the children to write down the lyrics.

Using Drama

According to Wagner (1976) as cited in Moore (2004) drama is powerful because its unique balance of thought and feeling makes learning exciting, challenging relevant to real-life concerns, and enjoyable. It provides valuable problem solving, social, and creative skills.

Drama gives teachers opportunity to teach their students in a way, which would create a love for learning. As teachers, if we are not providing a fun and meaningful learning environment for our children to learn, then we are not doing our jobs.

Drama embraces the child's imagination and emotions, which in many classrooms are shunned. Students who participate in drama are being involved in the learning. They are engaging in activities and immersed in the roles, which they assume.

We are naturally equipped with the ability to use drama in our lives. It can be said that drama is a way of life. We use drama from birth to death to overcome difficult situations, prepare ourselves, or learn something new.

According to a research that was done by Cremin et al. (2006), the research findings indicate that the adoption of multiple role perspectives, a critical feature of process drama, also contributes to the quality of writing and is another thread connecting drama and writing. Writing in role from a particular perspective during process drama, seemed to provide the learners with an extended opportunity to examine and develop that stance as they reflected upon the events of the fiction.

Using Games

It is a good idea to set up real tasks in the language classroom if possible. Real tasks provide children with an occasion for real language use, and let their subconscious mind work on the processing of language while their conscious mind is focused on the task. Games are very important for indirect learning because they provide an effective opportunity for the real using and processing of language while the mind is focused on playing the game.

Games are not a waste of time but real work, a central part of the process of getting hold of the language because children have a very good sense of play and fun.

Children can have better ideas than teachers. An example is given in Brunello and Borsari (2013). Their description refers to a class of nine to ten year olds. They were doing an activity which asked them to follow directions round a map in order to check true/ false statements about the location of shops. The cards and maps they were using had been clipped together with a paper clip. One pair proceeded to "drive" the paper round the map each time they traced the route. They made appropriate cornering noises as they turned left or right, and reversed

with much vocal squealing of brakes when they went wrong. The teacher's first reaction was to tell them not to be silly. Second thoughts suggested that, by translating understanding into physical reaction, they had thought up a much more powerful way of giving meaning to the phrases "turn left/turn right, take the second turning on the left/right" etc. Teachers' understanding of how children learn English will determine their philosophy of teaching, teaching styles, methods, and classroom management techniques.

CONCLUSION

As English is a very important language, it becomes a local content subject in Indonesia. Because English is not Indonesian native language, teachers should introduce it carefully to students to make them feel comfortable to learn a new language that is really different with their first language. Therefore teachers should arrange a comfortable environment for the students so they can learn comfy.

Young learners are active learners they easily get bored if they do not like the materials. By using stories, songs, drama, and game teachers can create some good ways to deliver English. Through these activities, the students can improve their English skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing; vocabulary and pronunciation.

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