

Teachers' Strategies in Teaching English to Young Learners in Private Primary Schools in Yogyakarta

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ABSTRACT

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Teaching English to young learners is not easy because English is not their mother tongue. Children find English difficult to master. Strategies are needed when teaching English. For that reason, the researchers conducted the study to describe the problems faced by the teachers in teaching English to young learners and to explain their strategies in teaching English to private primary school students. This research was conducted by using descriptive qualitative research. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers at private primary schools in Yogyakarta. The research subjects included six English teachers in the even semester of the academic year 2019/2020 at the private primary schools in Yogyakarta. The validity of the data was gained through the triangulation technique. In this study, the researchers analyzed the data, categorizing the data, making explanations, and finally drawing conclusions. The research indicated that there are nine problems the teacher faces when teaching English to young learners. They are limited time, diverse characters of students, less focused students, bickering students, the English position in the national curriculum, a large number of students and classes, unsupported facilities, learning media, and the fact that English is not a tool of communication. Meanwhile, the strategies they applied to teach the students were cooperative, contextual, think together with the students, expository, inquiry, exploration-elaboration-collaboration, TPR, students' active learning, and video strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

As an international language, introducing English to elementary school students is a strategic policy since they like to learn something new, including foreign cultures. Indeed, one important aspect of teaching them English effectively is to create a fun and creative learning atmosphere so that children do not feel pressured when studying foreign languages. Fitrawati (2013) said that the teaching and learning process must be connected with daily life, and most importantly, the process must be fun. Jazuly and Indriyani (2018) stated that "children have fun with physical movements and the more excited they are, the easier it is for them to remember the language learned."

Strategies are needed when teaching foreign languages. Various strategies undertaken by the teacher can make students enjoy reading, speaking, listening, and writing material. Lestari and Pratolo (2019) mentioned several strategies used by the English teachers in Islamic Boarding School: (a) Student-Centered Learning Strategy, (b) Collaborative Strategy, (c) Drilling Strategy and (d) Beneficial Strategies. Student-centered learning strategy is used because students are very enthusiastic when performing alone and showing their English skills. Collaborative Strategy is to prevent students' boredom when receiving lessons. It stimulates students' curiosity about the activities they will do next; thereby, they remain enthusiastic about participating in the lesson. The teacher understands the students' weaknesses in vocabulary mastery. The teacher uses drilling strategy to improve students' vocabulary skills. Limited time and learning tools encourage teachers choose beneficial strategies for students related to the success of students' examinations or evaluations.

Compared to the research by Lestari and Pratolo (2019), which focused on strategies applied in more specific skills such as vocabulary, reading, and listening, the present study examined the strategies used by the teachers in TEYL. It discusses all aspects related to the teachers' strategies in TEYL in the private primary schools in Yogyakarta and finds out the teachers' problems in TEYL.

METHOD

The researchers used descriptive qualitative research to obtain the data. The research subjects involve six English teachers (3 male and 3 female teachers) at the private primary school in Yogyakarta. All of them agreed to join the interview. The researchers chose them by considering some aspects, i.e., representatives of private schools in Yogyakarta with different quality and gender equality. In this research, the researchers collected the data through semi-structured interviews. The triangulation of data sources was used as a data validity technique (Creswell, 2012; Miles et al., 2014).

In the present study, the researchers began collecting the data by conducting interviews with teachers at the private primary schools in Yogyakarta. Then the interview results were written, then the data were categorized, explained, and finally taken into conclusions. The result of this research was checked by the research subjects to ensure the data were valid. The researchers contacted the subjects and asked them whether they agreed on their statements that the researchers have summarized by showing them the summary of the interview (Creswell, 2014).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Several teachers' statements in the interview are cited to support the description of the findings.

The Problems Faced by the Teachers in TEYL

The researchers found some problems encountered by the teachers in the private schools under study. They are related to limited time, students' diverse characters, students' focus deficiency, students' misbehavior, English not being a compulsory subject, a large number of classes and students, insufficient facilities, English not being a tool of communication, and language of delivery.

The first problem is limited time. The lack of time given to teaching English in private primary schools is one of the biggest problems faced by the teachers. Teaching English in private primary schools is only given 35 to 90 minutes. While situating the students before class usually takes at least 5 minutes, getting the students' attention for more than 5 minutes, delivering the material takes more time, and closing the class takes more than 5 minutes. So, it takes more than 35 minutes to teach English in private primary schools to deliver the material well.

The second problem is the different characters of the students. There are various characteristics of the students found in the class. Some students may be active, some may be shy or quiet, and others may be noisy. The teacher finds this diverse characteristic as a problem because finding one suitable way to teach may be difficult. Quiet and noisy students may need different ways of teaching. A less focused student is the third problem faced by the teachers in TEYL. Students with a low attention span may get so much easier to get distracted. The condition can disturb the learning and teaching process.

"[...] the duration of teaching in elementary school is only 35 minutes for lower classes and 70 minutes for upper classes. 35 minutes in total. [...] we greet, condition the class, attendance is approximately 5 minutes. Warming up 10 minutes, the remaining time is only 25 minutes [...]"

The next problem is bickering students. Students who fight a lot can also disturb the teaching and learning process. Calming them down would take so much time that it will waste the teaching time. The fifth problem is the position of English in the national curriculum because in private primary schools, English is considered a non-compulsory subject. Many students, students' parents, and other teachers underestimate this subject so that the other teachers would ask for English class time.

The next problem is that in most private primary schools, there is only one English teacher available. The situation forces them to teach all of the classes and grades. It becomes a problem

because most teachers would feel saturated and overwhelmed, especially when assessing the students' work.

"(read: the children are noisy) because they are disturbed by their friends so that they chase each other or make fun of their parents' names."

The seventh problem is unsupported facilities because if the teacher teaches English only using textbooks, it makes the students bored without utilizing the school facilities. The next problem is that students must practice the language by using it as a communication tool in learning a language. The problem with the students is that they only use English at school and never practice it outside the class. The last problem is given only a short teaching time, it makes the teacher have difficulty in choosing which learning material is suitable to cover the whole material in only one meeting.

"[...] students learn English only as a subject, not as a tool of communication. So at home [...] never talk, never practice. So learning English only at school [...], after that it was never used."

The Strategies Used by the Teachers to Teach English to Elementary School Students

Various kinds of strategies are used by teachers when teaching English to students in private primary schools. The first strategy is cooperative strategies focusing the students into groups to achieve learning goals. The strategy encourages inactive children to be more active and willing to socialize. According to Vygotsky as cited in Zainollah (2016), children learn through social contexts with people they recognize. By socializing, they feel happy and can follow language learning easily. The students' participation becomes more frequent, and this is their natural character.

The second strategy is contextual. It connects the materials learned in the class with the students' context. The strategy helps students understand the lesson easily as it is relatable with their lives. Besides, they also prefer real objects rather than imagining things told by the teacher. One of the strategies used by the teachers in teaching English to elementary school students is applying stories and materials that are familiar to the student (Imaniah & Nargis, 2017). Thinking together with the students is the next strategy. The strategy can be used for students in the upper class because they can think better than students in the lower class. By using strategy, the class will be alive and active. Through this strategy, students are helped to understand lessons easily and give students plenty of time to answer questions from the teacher. Besides, it helps improve their speaking skills. Lestari and Pratolo (2019) stated, "in-class speaking, performances, discussions, pronunciation exercises through drilling, and demonstrations can be done to improve the students' speaking skills."

"[...] I made the children in groups and I mixed active and less active children so they wanted to be invited to a discussion."

Expository is the next strategy, focusing on teacher-centered learning process. Although the current curriculum requires student-centered learning, for private primary school students, especially the lower classes, it is still difficult to implement the model because the students cannot focus on learning, often play during learning process, and are not interested in learning English. Therefore, the teacher's role is needed when teaching students at lower classes. Abrar (2016) said one of the characters of young learners is not fascinated in learning.

The fifth strategy is the inquiry strategy. The strategy is also known as student-centered learning. Students are given more opportunities to be more active; they are allowed to develop their potential because they will be more active than teachers in teaching and learning activities. By being active, students will be more confident because they can show their abilities. Lestari and Pratolo (2019) said that student-centered learning is used because students are very enthusiastic when performing alone and showing their English skills.

Exploration, Elaboration, and Collaboration is the next strategy used by the teacher is TEYL. It can help students recall what they have learned before since they will easily forget about learning. Therefore, the strategy can be used to help students continue to remember the lessons they get. Recalling a memory is used to help students remember past lessons; sometimes many students forget the knowledge they learned before (Lestari, Asrori & Sulistyawati, 2019).

"There is no specific strategy [...] certainly using exploration, elaboration, and collaboration. Exploration is we discussed yesterday's material or that will be delivered. Elaboration is the delivery of material, and collaboration is to recall the material that has just been delivered."

The seventh strategy is total physical response. It is one of the ways used to make students more active. In particular, students will move a lot during the lesson because it is their nature. Using the strategy will certainly greatly assist students in obtaining learning because the more they feel happy and not depressed, the easier it is for them to learn. The strategy also helps students to do physical activities. Uysal and Yavuz (2015) said, "physical activities such as walking, running, jumping, dancing, and climbing give a positive contribution to language learning." Jazuly and Indriyani (2018) stated, "children have fun with physical movements, and the more excited they are, the easier it is for them to remember the language learned."

Students' active learning is the eighth strategy used by the teachers. The strategy is divided into three types, namely games (whispering, bolding-coloring-gluing, and monopoly), role-play, and quizzes. Using games help students improve their listening, speaking, and writing skills. For example, in the whispering game students have to listen to the sentences spoken by the teacher, then say them to their friends and finally write down on the blackboard what their friends have

said before. Meanwhile, using role-play can help develop students' speaking skills because they will have much conversation. Using the strategy makes classroom activities more varied. Further, carrying out a quiz will help students remember the lessons they have learned.

The last strategy is using video. It makes children happy when learning and not bored because they can see the animations or the people in the video or hear voices other than their teachers and friends. According to Pratama and Awaliyah (2015), the strategies used by the teacher are role play, watching videos, games, pronouncing drilling, digital storytelling, and repetition.

"The first principle is that student active learning must be applied in any learning. If active children feel that the activities belong to them, they are not as forced. [...] usually what children like the most are games (whispering game, role-playing and monopoly game), competitions, and quizzes [...]"

The schools where the teachers teach are private schools that are also religion-based.

Discussion

One of the problems faced by the teachers when teaching English to young learners is hyper-activeness (Copland, Garton & Burns, 2014). Hyperactive students cannot calm down and sit still in class. Sometimes, they disturb their friends who are seriously studying. It may cause exhaustion to teachers because they have to spend most of their time taking care of the hyperactive students, instead of teaching the class as a whole.

Another problem, the students only use English at school. When they are at home, they only use their mother tongue. It is in line with Widodo and Dewi (2018), mentioning that English is not a tool of communication for them. It arises a problem for teachers because they have to try harder to make the students use English. Besides, the time to learn is highly limited: once a week. Further, it hinders students from mastering English.

Another problem faced by English teachers is noisy students because they disturb their friends, as said by Nurasiah (2017) and Widodo and Dewi (2018). When they are noisy, their friends cannot concentrate. In addition, annoying friends in class usually end in fights, which makes learning timeless because the teacher has to reconcile students who are fighting. Limited time and a large number of students in one class, are also problems for English teachers. It is in accordance with Abrar (2016), Cruickshank et al. as cited in Nurasiah (2017). The teacher finds it difficult because of insufficient time to prepare classes, deliver material, and conduct evaluations. Besides, the short time provided to learn in the class has limited the opportunities for students to understand the materials.

Another problem faced by the teacher is the status of English as only a complementary subject. The status makes English ignored by the government (Anggraini, 2018). In addition, the

government's lack of concern triggers the teachers to underestimate the subject. Since it is not a complementary subject, classroom teachers often takes more portion to teach other subjects; reducing the time for the students to learn English.

Unsupported facilities, such as a broken projector or power failure when the teachers want to use the projector, also become a problem. As said by Abrar (2016), revealing that one of the problems faced by the teacher is limited facilities. Teachers need to prepare an alternative plan to anticipate power failure or broken projector. Besides, learning only by using books makes students bored and makes them ignore learning. However, when teachers use facilities such as projectors to display video, students become more interested and pay attention to the material presented by the teacher, especially lower-class students.

Pictures, videos, and realia, are media used by teachers when teaching English to young learners, as said by Pratama and Awaliyah (2015), Zainollah (2016), Imaniah and Nargis (2017), and Liyaningsih (2017). Besides, playing games is also used in teaching English to young learners, because when playing games, children feel relaxed and not depressed so that it is easier for them to learn English, it is in accordance with Zainollah (2016), Imaniah and Nargis (2017), and Lestari, Asrori and Sulistyawati (2019).

TPR is one of the strategies used by English teachers when teaching because it can make children more active and this makes them enjoy learning and feel happy, so it is easy for them to master English (Uysal and Yavuz, 2015; Mubarok, 2016; Putri, 2016; Jazuly and Indriyani, 2018; Lestari, Asrori and Sulistyawati, 2019; Nuraeni, 2019). Another strategy used by the teacher is exploration-elaboration-collaboration. Exploration and collaboration aim to make students recall the lessons they have learned, and recalling memory helps students recover their memories about past lessons because many of them easily forget about the lessons they have learned (Mubarok, 2016; Lestari, Asrori & Sulistyawati, 2019).

Another strategy used by teachers when teaching English is classroom discussion. By using the strategy, the teacher can think together with students. Students are given the freedom to ask questions about the material being studied. Hence, the interaction between teacher and student or student and student makes the class more alive and active (Lestari, Asrori & Sulistyawati, 2019; Lestari & Pratolo, 2019). Student active learning is used because this strategy is student-centered so that students will be more active, making them master English indirectly (Lestari & Pratolo, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the researchers found nine problems the teachers faced. Those problems are limited time, diverse characters of students, less focused students, bickering

students, the English position in the national curriculum, the number of students and classes, unsupported facilities, learning media, and the status of English not as a tool of communication. Furthermore, there were also nine strategies used by teachers in TEYL; they are cooperative, contextual, think together with the students, expository, inquiry, exploration-elaboration-collaboration, total physical response, student active learning (whispering game, role-play, monopoly game, bolding-coloring-gluing game, and quizzes), and using video strategies.

In the end, the researchers expect those findings may add new insights and references particularly for English teachers to understand problems and solutions of their teaching practices. In addition, the researchers also suggest other researchers challenge themselves to conduct further relevant studies, such as to teachers in state schools or in other areas.

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