

CAKRAWALA PENDIDIKAN

**FORUM KOMUNIKASI ILMIAH
DAN EKSPRESI KREATIF
ILMU PENDIDIKAN**

Mengembangkan Pola Pikir Berwirausaha

**Membangun SMK Yang Unggul
Dalam Rangka Meningkatkan Daya Saing Lulusan
Untuk Menghadapi Persaingan Kerja
Di Era Masyarakat Ekonomi Asean (MEA)**

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Merajut Nasionalisme Ditengah Ancaman Disintegrasi Bangsa

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**The Effectiveness Sculpture Method In Teaching Writing
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Pemahaman Mahasiswa Berdasarkan Taksonomi Bloom

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THE STRENGTH OF NATURAL READER IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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STKIP PGRI BLITAR

Abstrak : Artikel ini membahas tentang pengajaran bahasa Inggris untuk pembelajar yang masih usia muda, yang meliputi keuntungan belajar bahasa Inggris di usia muda; karakter pembelajar usia muda; prinsip-prinsip dan strategi untuk mengajar bagi pembelajar usia muda; mendiskusikan tentang kegiatan pembelajaran dengan menggunakan media *visual, realia dan movement*; bergerak dari aktifitas satu ke aktifitas lainnya; menggunakan cerita dan bacaan yang sudah dikenal siswa dan mengadakan kegiatan berbahasa Inggris di dalam kelas. Agar pembelajar dapat berucap seperti layaknya penutur asli, maka dalam artikel ini secara khusus mendiskusikan praktek mengajar dengan menggunakan teks cerita yang akan dibaca dengan media *natural reader software*.

Kata Kunci : keunggulan, *natural reader*, pembelajar usia muda

Abstract: This article discusses the teaching English to young learners (TEYL), comprising the advantages of early language learning; young learners characteristics; the principles for teaching English to young learners and the strategies for teaching English to young learners discussing the supplement activities with visuals, realia, and movement; moving from activity to activity; using stories and contexts familiar to students and establishing classroom routines in English. In order that the learners can achieve native-like pronunciation or proficiency, this article mainly discusses the teaching practice using the story texts with natural reader as a teaching medium.

Key Words : strength, natural reader, young learners

INTRODUCTION

As a lingua franca of the past century and the new millenium, English is one of the most important means for acquiring access to the world's intellectual, technical resources (Talebinezhad 2001), and officially big business (Maxom 2009). Due to the importance of English as an international language, spoken in many countries both as a native and as a second or foreign language, it is taught in the schools in almost every country on this earth. Considering the importance of English, in Indonesia, many elementary schools have been teaching English as an extracurricular to their students with the following reasons: Despite the fact that there are many points of

view about the best time to begin English language instruction and minor differences in student age and program categories, the fact is that in most countries, children are learning English at their younger ages. In many countries, English is a compulsory subject in the early primary grades (Nikolov, 2009; Pinter, 2006). In a recent survey of EYL teachers from 55 countries around the world, Shin and Crandall (2011) found that more than 50 percent of these countries introduced compulsory English language courses by third grade. Even in countries where families may choose the foreign language for their children to study, English is "overwhelmingly the first choice" (Garton, Copland, & Burns, 2011:5).

(Huda, 1999) has stated that there were two surveys about the need of English for young learners involving parents, teachers, and students of both public and private secondary schools were conducted. The first survey involving 8 provinces was conducted in 1988 and the second one conducted in 1989 involved 27 provinces. The results of the surveys showed that the majority of parents and student respondents stated that their children needed English in order to get good jobs in the future.

Read (2003) suggests that younger is better when learning is natural, contextualized and part of a real even, interesting and enjoyable, relevant, social, belongs to the child, has a purpose for the child, builds on things the child knows but also challenges the child, supported appropriately, offered in a relaxed and warm learning atmosphere. In addition, it can create a “*sense of achievement*” (Read, 2003, p. 7).

Another reason for starting language learning early is the possibility of better pronunciation and fluency. Some researchers have found that young learners are more likely to attain native-like pronunciation (Scovel, 1988), greater confidence in speaking the language, and better oral proficiency (Harley, 1998). These studies do not refute the possibility that older language learners can achieve native-like pronunciation or proficiency, but they suggest that younger learners may have an advantage. If children begin learning another language before age 11 or 12, and they are given appropriate instruction and input, they “*are more likely to acquire English to native levels without an accent*” (Pinter, 2006, p. 29). “*Appropriate instruction*” requires well-trained teachers with good English proficiency who can foster the creativity and imagination of young learners, take advantage of children's willingness to imitate or mimic what

they hear and to repeat the language, especially if the activity is fun.

THEORETICAL REFERENCES

Definition of Young Learners

To clarify for whom these ideas are targeted, it is important to define young learner. The online course used the definitions provided by **Slatterly and Willis (2001, 4)**: “Young Learners” (YL) were 7-12 years old; “Very Young Learners” (VYL) were defined as under 7 years of age. Although the online course was designed to train teachers of young learners, participants discussed ideas related to their teaching situations, which focused on both YLs and VYLs. Therefore, the ideas given below can be applied to learners ranging from approximately 5 to 12 years old and can be used for various proficiency levels.

Young Learners Characteristics

Harmer (1985) says that:

- a. Young learners are curious. They want to know a lot and that is why they like questioning about things which maybe considered unimportant by adults. Proper respond must be given to their questions so that they can learn. This curiosity will motivate them to do something.
- b. Young learners like to seek teacher approval. They will be well motivated when they have sufficient notices and appreciation from their teacher. This characteristic will often make the teacher of young learners very busy. The fact that we have to be attentive to our young students will require certain characteristic, that is patience.
- c. Young learners tend to be bored very easily and that is why they require constant changes of activities. They need activities which are exciting and stimulate their curiosity.
- d. Young learners do not like sitting and listening for a long time; they need to be

involved in something active and appreciated by their teacher, the important figure for them.

Considering children characteristics

Montessori (2001) says that:

- a. Children from six to twelve years old have intellectual curiosity and thirst for knowledge. These children will have a very high energy on his search for knowledge.
- b. These children have a remarkable capacity for imagination triggered by sensorial experiences. What they hear or see can be the foundation of their imagination. Thus, it is suggested that children of these ages should be given good stimulation so that they can produce something good.

Based on the characteristics of children/young learners given by Harmer and Montessori, it can be said that children are like sponges; they absorb everything around them. Klancar also says that children are like sponges, they soak up everything we say and how we say it. Thus clear and correct language input is of vital importance, since young learners repeat exactly what they hear. What has been learned at an early stage is difficult to change later on. One of the rules that applies here is: slowly and steadily, through constant revision and recycling. Furthermore, try to create positive and relaxed atmosphere in the young learners' classroom to achieve maximum result. They enjoy learning-as long as they do not have to learn "adult style". What is meant by "adult way" is that adults like to sit for a long time and discuss abstract concepts that children do not understand.

Principles for Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL)

The teacher of young learners must comprehend language learning principles before teaching their students in the classroom. These principles can bring teachers to the success of language teaching and learning in

the classroom. Vygotsky in Hudelson stated four principles in teaching English to young learners (TEYL):

- a. Children learn through experiences by manipulating surrounding objects.

Children are usually called the concrete operational stage of cognitive development. It means that children learn through hands-on experiences and manipulation. objects in the environment. Therefore, it is important for teacher of young learners to use media or realia in presenting the activities or materials so that the materials are understandable easily.

- b. Children learn through social context, in groups in which they know with one another.

Children learn in social context and in groups to make learners know one another. Therefore, English teachers should design the teaching process in social context situation or cooperative class to make the learners know each other.

- c. Acquisition takes place when learners comprehend how language is used.

Acquisition occurs through learners figuring out how the language works, through learners making and testing out hypotheses about the language. Therefore, English teacher should use English correctly although they employ short sentences when teaching in the classroom.

- d. Acquisition takes place in social interaction.

Language acquisition occurs through social interaction. It means that the teacher should use English in the classroom naturally as if they were in their society. The four principles above are the basic foundation for teachers in teaching English to young learners in the classroom. The process of language learning for young learner surely must be oriented to the mentioned principles. The mentioned principles

above give us information about what we teach and how we teach young learners in the classroom.

METHOD OF TEACHING

Strategies for Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL)

Nunan (1991) has pointed out that teacher and learner plays crucial effect in the process of English language teaching and learning. So the use of appropriate approaches, strategies and methods are very urgent to be considered by English teachers as important aspect, especially teachers of young learners. The following are suggested and recommended strategies for teacher of young learners to be considered as solution and activities in teaching English to young learners (TEYL) in the classroom.

a. Supplement activities with visuals, realia, and movement

Young learners tend to have short attention spans and a lot of physical energy. In addition, children are very much linked to their surroundings and are more interested in the physical and the tangible. As Scott and Ytreberg (1990, 2) describe, "Their own understanding comes through hands and eyes and ears. The physical world is dominant at all times."

One way to capture their attention and keep them engaged in activities is to supplement the activities with lots of brightly colored visuals, toys, puppets, or objects to match the ones used in the stories that you tell or songs that you sing. These can also help make the language input comprehensible and can be used for follow-up activities, such as re-telling stories or guessing games. Although it may take a lot of preparation time to make colorful pictures and puppets or to collect toys and objects,

it is worth the effort if you can reuse them in future classes. A great way to build your resources is to create a "Visuals and Realia Bank" with other teachers at your school by collecting toys, puppets, pictures, maps, calendars, and other paraphernalia and saving them for use in each other's classes. Included with the concept of visuals are gestures, which are very effective for students to gain understanding of language. In addition, tapping into children's physical energy is always recommendable, so any time movement around the classroom or even outside can be used with a song, story, game, or activity, do it! Asher's (1977) method, Total Physical Response (TPR), where children listen and physically respond to a series of instructions from the teacher, is a very popular method among teachers of young learners.

This popular method can be used as a technique with storytelling and with songs that teach language related to any kind of movement or physical action. Children have fun with movement, and the more fun for students, the better they will remember the language learned.

b. Moving from activity to activity

As stated before, young learners have short attention spans. For young students, from ages 5 to 10 especially, it is a good idea to move quickly from activity to activity. Do not spend more than 10 or 15 minutes on any one activity because children tend to become bored easily. As children get older, their ability to concentrate for longer periods of time increases. So for students ages 5–7, you should try to keep activities between 5 and 10 minutes long. Students ages 8–10 can handle activities that are 10 to 15 minutes long. It is always possible to revisit an activity later in class or in the next class.

For example, if you are teaching a song or telling a story, don't stay on that song or story the whole class time. Follow up the song or story with a related TPR activity to keep the momentum of the class going. Then have students play a quick game in pairs. As shown in this brief example, varying the types of activities also helps to keep young learners interested. Scott and Ytreberg (1990, 102) suggest creating a balance between the following kinds of activities:

quiet/noisy exercises
 different skills: listening/
 talking/reading/writing
 individual/pairwork/groupwork/
 whole class activities
 teacher-pupil/pupil-pupil activities

When teachers mix up the pace of the class and the types of activities used, students will be more likely to stay focused on the lesson, there-by increasing the amount of language learning in class.

c. Using stories and contexts familiar to students

Because young learners, especially VYLs, are just beginning to learn content and stories in their native language in school and are still developing cognitively, they may have limited knowledge and experience in the world. This means that the contexts that you use when teaching English, which may be a completely new and foreign language, should be contexts that are familiar to them. Use of stories and contexts that they have experience with in their L1 could help these young learners connect a completely new language with the background knowledge they already have. Teachers could take a favorite story in the L1 and translate it into English for students or even teach the language based on situations that are found in the native country, especially if the materials the teachers have depict English-

speaking environments that are unfamiliar to students.

d. Establishing classroom routines in English

Young learners function well within a structured environment and enjoy repetition of certain routines and activities. Having basic routines in the classroom can help to manage young learners. For example, to get students' attention before reading a story or to get them to quiet down before an activity, the teacher can clap short rhythms for students to repeat. Once the students are settled down, the teacher can start the lesson by singing a short song that students are familiar with, such as the alphabet song or a chant they particularly enjoy. Here is a chant with TPR that can get students ready to begin the class.

Reach up high! (Children reach their arms up in the air)
 Reach down low! (Children bend over and touch their toes.)
 Let's sit down and start the show! (Children sit down.)
 Look to the left! (Turn heads to the left.)
 Look to the right! (Turn heads to the right.)
 Let's work hard and reach new heights!

The movements can be substituted to teach new words. For example, instead of "Look to the left! Look to the right!" the teacher can use "Point to the left! Point to the right!" Providing some variation can keep this chant engaging. Just remember to keep the ending since it starts the class on a positive note. Add classroom language to the routines as well. When it's time to read a story, the teachers can engage students in the following dialogue:

Teacher : It's story time! What time is it, everyone?

Students : It's story time!

Teacher : And.... what do we do for story time?

Student : We tell stories!

Build on this language by adding more after students have mastered the above interaction. The teacher can follow up the previous interaction with: "That's right! The story is called The Very Hungry Caterpillar. What's the story called?" (Students answer.) Whatever the routine is, the teacher should build interactions in English around that routine. As Cameron (2001, 10) points out, "...we can see how classroom routines, which happen every day may provide opportunities for language development." The example below illustrates how the teacher and students can have real communicative interactions in English using some classroom language.

Teacher : Good morning, class!

Students : Good morning, Sir!

Teacher : *Faida*, what day is it today?

Faida: I don't know.

Teacher : Okay, then ask Asli.

Faida : Asli, what day is it today?

Asli : Today is Tuesday.

Teacher : Good! And what is Tuesday?

Students : Tuesday is Storytelling Day!

Notice that the communication is real and that a routine has been established. Once students become fluid with certain interactions, as in the example above, you can begin introducing more language into the daily routines.

The steps to promote the learners' pronunciation in the classroom Using Natural Reader Software

a. Motivation : It is essential to motivate students to want to read, even though it is not easy for the teacher to ask them to read because they are not accustomed to read

since they are still young learners. To accomplish this, teachers must provide frequent opportunities for students to listen to stories or passages read by the natural reader. Reading materials that sparks students' individual interest is more likely to encourage them to want to read.

b. Practice : Provide plenty of time for students- after they have listened the stories or passages read frequently by the natural reader-to practice reading and do repeated readings of the same stories or passages. *Choral reading* (everyone in the class reads together) and *partner reading* (one student reads with another) will also spice up the reading routine in the classroom.

c. Modeling : The natural reader should model fluent reading every day and the teacher encourage students to practice doing the same. Students who struggle with basic decoding skills may benefit from *echo reading* where the natural reader reads a short 3-5 word phrase and students echo the same phrase. By using this method, the natural reader is modeling and allowing emerging readers to practice, all at the same time. This is an effective way of increasing students' confidence levels, as well. It is suggested that the position of natural reader could be changed by the teacher if she or he has pronunciation.

d. Help: Teachers should assist in developing self-correction skills by encouraging students to listen to themselves read and monitor their own reading. After reading a selection, teach students to ask themselves, "Did what I just read make good pronunciation?" It is also important for teachers to demonstrate to pronounce the words correctly.

Why Natural Reader?

Natural Reader software is a professional text reader that converts any text into spoken words. It lets you listen to text while

you read. Just one click, you can have your computer speak aloud any text from almost any program—MS Word, Webpage, PDF files, and E-mails etc. Natural Reader can also convert any written text into audio files such as MP3 for your CD player or iPod. The program is very simple to use: select the text, then click the 'Play' button.

Rifa'I (2015) has proved that the Natural Reader software could significantly prove that students learning English was able to read more accurately and at a more appropriate pace and he also points out that by using natural reader software, the students could easily have frequently chances to listen the words read by the native speakers as a reader model at normal speed and repeat the copied reading text up to they were able to read fluently as the reader model read the text. These results was also similar to a study conducted by Roundy and Roundy in 2009 explaining that a high level of automaticity is attained as a result of repeated cycles of reading. Fluency experts (Goering & Baker, 2010; Rasinski, et al., 2005; Morris & Gaffney, 2011 as cited by Abram) state that oral reading fluency instruction does improve overall reading proficiency at all grade levels.

Using Natural Reader for Reading Text Aloud.

Activate Natural Reader by double clicking on the icon on the desktop....

Using the Natural Reader window to read text:

- a. Copy and paste the text to be read into the reading area of the software.
- b. Click on the play arrow button to have the text in the box read out loud.
- c. Click on the stop square to move cursor to another area to be read. In the program window, the words highlight as it reads.

CONCLUSION

Young learners is better when learning is natural, contextualized and part of a real even, interesting and enjoyable, relevant, social, belongs to the child, has a purpose for the child, builds on things the child knows but also challenges the child, supported appropriately, offered in a relaxed and warm learning atmosphere. Another reason for starting language learning early is the possibility of better pronunciation, and of course well-trained teachers with good English proficiency who can foster the creativity and imagination of young learners are needed.

Young Learners have unique Characteristics, they are curious. They like to seek the teachers' approval. They will be well motivated when they have sufficient notices and appreciation from their teacher, they tend to be bored very easily, they do not like sitting and listening for a long time; they need to be involved in something active and appreciated by their teacher, they have intellectual curiosity and thirst for knowledge and they have a remarkable capacity for imagination triggered by sensorial experiences.

The teacher of young learners must comprehend language learning principles before teaching their students in the classroom, such as the following: 1) children learn through experiences by manipulating surrounding objects, therefore, it is important for teacher of young learners to use media or realia in presenting the activities or materials so that the materials are understandable easily, 2) children learn through social context, in groups in which they know with one another, therefore, English teachers should design the teaching process in social context situation or cooperative class to make the learners know each other, 3) acquisition takes place when learners comprehend how language is used, therefore, English teacher should use English

correctly although they employ short sentences when teaching in the classroom, 4) acquisition takes place in social interaction, it means that the teacher should use English in the classroom naturally as if they were in their society.

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