

# **ENGLISH INSTRUCTION FOR EARLY-CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: A Case Study at TK Riyadul Jannah Simo Boyolali, Central Java**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Kindergarten children are creative, resourceful, and imaginative. During the kindergarten years, the children's perceptual skills can be sharpened by encouraging them to observe specific aspects of their environment. In line with the need of English as the international and the most spoken language, English subject is being taught to students from elementary to university level, or even to kindergarten. The consideration is that English should be taught very early as the students will easily absorb the English materials later on. However, kindergarten teachers in Indonesia are actually not the experts of the field. There are still limited graduated teachers majoring in kindergarten or early childhood education department. Promoting an effective learning can only be well done by teachers who are qualified enough. In addition, there is no best method in teaching such a foreign language to these young students. To sum up, teaching a foreign language to very young students who are living in and accustomed to the first language is a challenging task for the kindergarten teachers.

**Keywords:** *Stakeholders Condition, English Instruction, Kindergarten*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The global development is signed due to the improvement of facilities and infrastructures. This also asks for identity equity to meet communication. This possibly promotes a monopoly done by a language which later becomes the human need to live side by side. This outstanding momentum is won by English which is mostly spoken as international mean of communication. Though there is no such

obligation to study or to learn this language, each of man who feels as part of the global society needs to acquire the language to get involve in the earth communication. The decision making to state English as the international language cannot be separated from roles of history in confirming English as language for all inhabitants in this world.

The effect of using English as mean of international communication makes the mentioned language as one of the need in life even though it is not the primary one. However, not all inhabitants in the world are able to use and master the language as their first/foreign spoken communication. There are still many people who regard this language as foreign language, as always. Mastering the language depends on to whom this is important. Mostly, the language is used by those who are educated, or at least people who concern to the language, as the language becomes a compulsory subject taught to students even in Indonesia or in other countries. Surprisingly, the language is often a subject tested in the national examination. The language is also the used language in economics, social, sport, and other fields that force people under the fields to master it both actively and passively. Thus, it can be concluded that the English language is the language for all people in the universe.

For Indonesians particularly students, English is one the most frightening subjects instead of Mathematics and science. Meanwhile, this subject is being thought to students from elementary to university level or even to kindergarten. The language is taught systematically following the curriculum and syllabus in unit of material. To add, the language development of English is in line with the development of global information as it is used in technological and informative devices in computers and other appliances such as mobile phone, laptop, and etc. Thus, computer is also delivered to students in all levels of education as additional and important subject. Is this an advantage or even a burden for students? No one wonders for the answer.

Talking about readiness, kindergarten education in Indonesia adopts English subject within the curriculum. The considerations could be English is an international language that should be taught very early as the pupils will be easily catch the

material. The age, range from 2-5 years old, is also an influential consideration as this phase is regarded as a good phase to catch all informative subject including English as foreign language. The outcome is that the graduated students of this kindergarten level will be ready to continue the mentioned language in advanced study. To note, the material of English is also situated to their condition that they are still children. They are taught about numbers, letters, days, months, animals, English tales and songs, and many others performed in plays. Thus, basic English is the most realistic alternative.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Children's Language Development*

There seem to be great similarities in all human societies in the sequence of language development as children progressively master the rules of sounds (phonology), of meaning (semantics), and of grammar (syntax), and learn to combine words, in which are acceptable and understandable (pragmatics) within their linguistic community. By 24-27 months the child is regularly producing three and four-word utterances. There are many sentences which are in a strict sense "ungrammatical" but which reveal that the child is in fact using grammatical rules of syntax (Borisch, 2007). These errors are actually a phase called "logical errors".

These are examples of words produced by a 26 months baby boy, Algo who is a student of a playgroup of TK Riyadul Jannah Simo, "Mama ais napa?" (*Mama kenapa menangis? Why is Mama crying?*) or "Adek mimik uh" (*Adek mimik susu/I want milk*). These are also examples of 27 months baby sentences: "I no want it" instead of "I don't want it" and "not my daddy work" instead of "My daddy didn't work". Those examples are considered as ungrammatically correct but people next to the children understand the real messages of the sentences as this is the phase in which children develop their language performance.

The child who speaks English as his first language also learns errors in his speech. He will have acquired the basic grammar system needed for everyday communication. The basic grammar mastery will usually complete at his teen ages. Children learning English as foreign language also makes errors which can be seen as active learning. The mentioned feature shows that both first and second language

children are not just imitating what they hear, but are working out how the language system operates. This is a phase when children look through and see about language.

Skinner (1953) argues that children acquire language because adults reinforce correct usage. Successive approximations are rewarded or reinforced until finally the child's language is similar to the adult's. Other learning theorists suggest that imitation also plays an important part in language acquisition (Bandura, 1971). Thus, adults may correct the language usage of children then they imitate the words. Overall, children are able to communicate through language because they are blessed with LAD (Language Acquisition Device) naturally as being promoted by Chomsky.

### ***Experts Judgment on Language Teaching***

Thus, English as a foreign language must be taught naturally and communicatively. Reviewing to the natural method, Nunan's overview of the Natural Approach (1989, pp. 194-195), adapted here, outlines its characteristics:

#### 1. Theory of Language

The essence of language is meaning. Vocabulary, not grammar, is the heart of language. This situation must be situated well. The vocabulary used in teaching kindergarten students is the words that are simple and easily understood.

#### 2. Theory of Learning

There are 2 ways of L2 language development: acquisition is a natural sub-conscious process, and learning is a conscious process. Learning cannot lead to acquisition. For kindergarten students, the learning is done naturally as they perceive the learning in an unconscious manner (like the acquisition process).

#### 3. Objectives

Language teaching is designed to give beginners/ intermediate learners' communicative skills in four broad areas: basic personal communicative skills (oral/written); and academic learning skills (oral/written). Although communicative

skills are hard to achieve, kindergarten pupils are taught in English to meet communication for children.

#### 4. Syllabus

It is based on a selection of communicative activities and topics derived from the learner needs. This is very risky, the teacher along with the institution should provide good syllabus planning by considering that the participants are still children of early-childhood. For example, a teacher seeks for worksheets which may contribute to pleasure in English activity learning.

#### 5. Activity Types

Activities allow comprehensible input about things in the here-and-now: focus on meaning, not form. It is very important to put words which are familiar to kindergarten students. The learning process is done as a fun activity in which the children are not aware that they are studying English.

#### 6. Learner's Roles

Learners should not try and learn language in the usual sense but should try and lose themselves in activities involving meaningful communication.

#### 7. Teacher's Roles

The teacher is the primary source of comprehensible input. He/she must create positive low-anxiety climate. In addition, he/she must choose and orchestrate a rich mixture of classroom activities. He/she performs the teaching in communicative and pleasant activity.

#### 8. Roles of Materials

Materials come from realia rather than textbooks. The primary aim is to promote comprehension and communication. Thus, the decision to use worksheets that may attract the kindergarten students' interest is very crucial.

Another expert who drives the natural approach to second/foreign language acquisition is Stephen Krashen. He promotes his five hypotheses, they are:

1. The Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis. He claims that there are two distinctive ways of developing second language competence: acquisition, using language for "real communication", and learning--"knowing about" or "formal knowledge" of a language. Though learning English for kindergarten students of TK Riyadul Jannah is a formal one but again the main focus is to meet basic communication wrapped in fun activities.
2. The Natural Order hypothesis. To this hypothesis, someone acquires the rules of language in a predictable order. It means that English is firstly introduced in familiar words to kindergarten students according to themes such as animals, vegetables, transportation, etc.
3. The Monitor Hypothesis. The hypothesis confirms that conscious learning can only be used as a monitor or an editor (Krashen & Terrell 1983) and cannot lead to fluency.
4. The Input Hypothesis. The hypothesis tells that humans acquire a language in only one way-- by understanding messages or by receiving "comprehensible input".
5. The Affective Filter Hypothesis. To this hypothesis, human's mental block is caused by affective factors that prevents input from reaching the language acquisition device (Krashen, 1985, p. 100).

Piaget (1952) is concerned with how the learner develops understanding. Children's minds are not empty but actively process material. The role of maturation (growing up) and children's increasing capacity to understand their world in terms of developmental stages is central to his view.

1. Children are constrained by their individual stage of intellectual development. They cannot undertake certain tasks until they are psychologically mature enough to do so.
2. There is an emphasis on discovery learning rather than teacher imparted information.

3. The readiness to learn, when learners are to progress, is different for each individual.
4. The idea of a linear development through stages has been widely used in the design and scheduling of school curricula.

### ***Kindergarten Education***

Kindergarten children are creative, resourceful and imaginative. We can easily see that they are fascinated with objects all around them. They squeeze, roll, scratch, pinch, taste, throw, pound and chew these objects during play to learn as much as they can about them.

During the kindergarten years, the children's perceptual skills can be sharpened by encouraging them to observe specific aspects of their environment. Training in visual discrimination can be done in an enjoyable way through games, for example, jig-saw, picture-matching games, and exercises in grading shapes and objects by size or by color (Smith et al., 2003). Thus, language teaching, especially English, can be done by integrating game activities and lesson materials in worksheets.

Here, the teacher demonstrates picture-matching words and asks the students to guess the names of objects. They are also driven to develop an awareness of speech sounds/pronunciation (phonological awareness) that is believed to have an influence on their later ability to read. In relation to this condition, Bryant et al. (1990) hypothesized a direct link between sensitivity to sounds and competence in learning to read. Take as an example, the teacher shows a picture of a sheep and then the students automatically pronounce "embek" to represent the animal's voice. Then, the teacher agrees to the sound and loudly states that the mentioned animal is sheep. He/she then pronounces "sheep" and write the word on the board.

### ***Teaching English for Kindergarten Children in Indonesia***

Teaching a foreign language to very young students who have been accustomed to using their first language is not an easy job. This might be because they have been already in a process of understanding both their local and national languages. Thus, to experts, children under 11-12 years old have the potential in

mastering various knowledge including language acquisition. This period is wellknown as the critical period where actually all input knowledge will be optimally received by those children (Soenjono, 2005).

Teacher might expect children of primary age to acquire much foreign language through play, for example. One of the most common beliefs about age and language learning is that young children learn faster and more effectively than any age group (Harmer, 2004). It is certainly true that children who learn a new language early have a facility with the pronunciation which is sometimes denied by older learners. Lynne Cameron claims that children reproduce the accent of their teachers with deadly accuracy (2003, p. 111).

The way of obtaining language complex system to children is partially understood. Acquiring and mastering a language in their physical and mental development are an undefined phase. This condition delivers to later question: what is adult contribution to children language development? Do children perceive a language through a passive dialogue with parents, siblings, friends, and touches (including gestures) from adults? Or are they naturally systemized to learn and to produce language?

In relation to passive language, Krashen, along with Terrell, developed the "input theory," which stresses maximum amounts of passive language or what Krashen (1979) refers to as 'i+1' (input + 1), language input that is just a little beyond the learner's current level of comprehension. Krashen contends that through context and extra linguistic information, like a mother talking to her child, hence the "natural approach", learners will climb to the next level and then repeat the process. The message is more important than the form. The input is one way, from the teacher, and learners will participate when ready.

In studying the correlation between language acquisition and natural language device of children, especially to kindergarten students, it is a different case. No doubt, parents have already introduced both local and national, even foreign language for some conditions, in very early as means of communication. Later, the children acquire the language both first and foreign language formally in schools that is usually delivered the language subject integratively through songs,

games, tales, etc. The teacher teaches them counting, spelling, reading, pronouncing, and translating. They are added to general knowledge of animals' names, colors, days, months, and etc. guided by the teacher. To note, the model of teaching to comprehend a correct structure of communication in cases of aims and meanings needs to be considered (Krashen, 1985). It is merely because the outcome will be beneficial and sophisticated. If the students are hoped to correctly master and generalize every mistakes as process, it will influence motivation and attitude of students that may contribute to frustration. It is what is meant by teaching foreign language is not easy. An effective conditioning in order to obtain maximum input is very important. We acquire language in an amazingly simple way – when we understand messages. We have tried everything else – learning grammar rules, memorizing vocabulary, using expensive machinery, forms of group therapy etc. What has escaped us all these years, however, is the one essential ingredient: comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985, p. vii).

To sum up, there is no best method in teaching a foreign language to students. "...there is, as Gebhard et al.(1990:16) argue, no convincing evidence from pedagogic research, including research into second language instruction, that there is any universally or 'best' way to teach. Although, clearly, particular approaches are likely to prove more effective in certain situations, blanket prescription is difficult to support theoretically. The art of teaching does not lie in accessing a checklist of skills but rather in knowing which approach to adopt with different students, in different curricular circumstances or in different cultural settings" (Klapper 2001, p.17).

## PROBLEMS IN TK RIYADUL JANNAH

### *The Limited Availability and Qualification of English Teachers*

Life is a fascinating world of activity to a young child - a place for doing and discovering and trying out ideas. Too often, however, school environments don't encourage children's natural sense of discovery. Instead of learning through this most appropriate method - play experience and discovery - school all too often turns out to be a place where children just sit and listen to the teacher talk most of the

time; where children watch the teacher demonstrate things on the blackboard; where the teacher thinks that there is only one correct answer.

In this type of school, for the first time in their lives, children may stop learning or find their natural learning processes thwarted (taken from <http://www.discoverycenter.co.id/aboutdc.html>). Thus, language teaching must be taught integratively through games or other pleasure activities in order not to promote fatigue and bored situation.

.Kindergarten teachers in Indonesia are actually not from experts of the field. There are still limited teachers graduated from kindergarten department. Thus, playgroup and kindergarten programs in universities are booming as the need of teacher in field arise. In line with English teaching, many teachers are limited in this language competence as they are not from English department. Mathematics, social, religious, and many more graduated teachers are now teaching kindergarten students, particularly in private schools. This situation also happened in TK Riyadul Jannah. As most kindergarten faced a problem in the availability of adequate English teachers to teach children less than 7 years, this school only provided an English teacher while the students were more than 40. Most teaching in kindergarten were not from the English department but sometimes tackled the situation to teach English to students. Imagine! Pronunciation and spelling then became a very big issue here. This teacher pronounced "free" for the word "three". Unfortunately, she repeated the similar pronunciation very often. Not surprisingly, she was not from English department but religious studies. The condition would be fine if at least she was from kindergarten department as English subject was also included in the program. She mispronounced many English words that later it would affect the students' pronunciation in their advanced studies. Thus, it will lead to a problematic condition. Teaching English to children must be tackled by experts in the field. Here, it will be helpful if English subject is taught by a teacher graduating from the English department.

To note, some schools are in impoverished areas where the overall income and education levels of the community are low, whereas other schools are located in more affluent communities. The styles, condition, learning process, and the like are

also different between rural suburb and urban areas. In terms of the facilities, schools in urban areas are more improved than those in rural suburbs. However, playgroups which are rare in the rural areas are now developing. There are more than five playgroups as an early education in the areas. Thus, the needs of stakeholders also arise.

However, not all schools are careful in hiring teachers to teach these young students especially for English subject. English nowadays is already taught in kindergarten as the starting point. Many teachers are now responsible for teaching children with limited or no English language capacity in classroom in teaching English to students particularly of kindergarten and elementary level (Borisch, 2007). This mostly occurs in such non-English speaking countries. The previous situation, as my own experience, is still happening. They are not well-trained yet as their backgrounds are varied. Schools only try to find teachers who have willingness to teach children and who have self-affection to children. Again, this is not enough. There are many issues to consider in order to educate children and produce qualified outcomes. Promoting an effective learning will only be done by teachers who are really qualified in the field which in line with their educational background. One aspect of an effective learning climate is the physical or visual arrangement of the classroom. This arrangement is a matter of choice that can be altered to create just the right climate for the learning objectives (Borisch, 2007).

Talking about a good or an effective teacher, it is a necessary not to be taken to granted. Borisch (2007) defines an effective teacher as a model who not only fulfills the needs of the society, parents, but students as well. A teacher should show a good attitude in the society and manner in the classroom and in the school. He/she should have a commitment to be honest, polite, discipline, optimistic, and he/she must be a hard worker. The criteria show the quality of a teacher in demonstrating and dedicating his/her knowledge at school.

Teacher's experience based on his/her education qualification, the length of teaching, character, and used methods in teaching becomes the bar of the teaching success in the classroom (Goldhaber & Anthony, 2003). The success level of

teaching and learning inspired from a teacher's qualification can be measured by tests such as professional test, scholastic and many others.

Personality of a teacher is also crucial factor. Borisch (2007) states that personality is the integration of one's traits, motives, beliefs, and abilities, including emotional responses, character, and even values. Personality, to Levis (1987), is a skill in bridging a cohesive nature of teaching that shows attitude, manner, emotion, and even close relationship between pupils and teacher. The attitude may show teaching activities done neatly toward the material and the classroom (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Kagan & Tippins, 1992). Good teaching attitude may give contribution to students' motivation improvement taught by a teacher.

### *The Need of a Good Curriculum*

The age of students is a major factor about how and what to teach. This is influenced by a consideration that different ages have different needs, competences, and cognitive skills. For kindergarten students, they may acquire much of foreign language through play. The words are mostly concrete words such as animals, cars, fruit, clothes, etc. The words are taught in a sequent manner which do not burden the children' thought. To add, the words introduced to these students will be a capital to love English and to continue advanced studies in elementary to university level.

In teaching, preparing lesson plan is very important. In other words, lesson plan is a mean of idea about what will be appropriate and what is expected. Using worksheets in teaching is only a part of implementing syllabus and lesson plan. Each institution might have consideration in using such worksheets. It is important to note, the worksheets should not contain hard material for kindergarten students. The teacher sometimes disobeyed the lesson plan sequence as being noted in curriculum planned by institution. It was obviously appear when they got confused about the order. Take for an example, they did not greet students but they deliberately passed on the worksheets. Package to teach kindergarten students should be attractive and fun.

In summary, the institution need to re-plan the syllabus design. If it is necessary, teachers should be trained about syllabus and the like. Again, teaching

English for kindergarten students is to meet communicative goals. If the stakeholders in the institution find problem on what should be done, the students will suffer more. The institution, first of all, need to have environmental and need analysis to figure out problems in teaching.

### *The Organizational Management*

As a private school owned by one of the greatest social organization in Indonesia, TK Riyadul Jannah was firstly founded to answer the need of kindergarten school for people in Simo, especially for the member of this organization. The location is far from the main road and is very representative to deliver knowledge and information for the school members. It gradually becomes a favorite place for pre-elementary children to study. Moreover, the numbers of students are improving year by year.

This kindergarten used to be only for students whose ages were 3-6 years old. Nowadays, this school also receives children from 6 months. These children are regarded as playgroup students. There used to be only two teachers who taught Class A (3-5 years old) and Class B (5-6 years old) and a headmaster. However, there are now more than ten teachers in that school. Unfortunately, this school institution is not careful in hiring the teachers who will be responsible in delivering the knowledge to the students. There are no teachers whose qualifications are from kindergarten department, even the headmaster. Two of them graduated from senior high schools whose jobs are babysitting children from 6 months to 2 years old. If there are teachers who do not understand the curriculum or ways in teaching, then this condition is normal as they do not have any competence in doing so.

It is totally a big problem when a kindergarten school is founded to meet only financial aim for the teachers. On one hand, many kindergartens give benefit for busy parents by putting their children there. On the other hand, the hiring process to seek qualified teachers is far from being called ideal. In relation to English instruction in this institution, parents should hand in hand with the institution if they find that there is something wrong with the English teaching. The institution should also provide facilities in the English teaching learning process by providing realia, for instance. The facilities can be used also for other subjects beside English.

## CONCLUSION

English as a foreign language must be taught naturally and communicatively. Teaching foreign language to very young students who have been accustomed to the use of first language is certainly a challenging job. It is believed that there is no best method in teaching subjects, particularly in English for example. Nonetheless, there are many strategies used in delivering English to students who are from non-English speaking countries e.g. Indonesia. But, English is better taught to Indonesia's children in early age to meet native-likeness.

Teacher might expect children of primary age to acquire much a foreign language through play. This method is used in order to internalize foreign language to young children competence that will be beneficial in the future. However, many considerations should be taken into account. Readiness level of both teacher and students; good shapes of teacher in terms of personality, experience, and attitude; and environmental conditions may lead to the success of delivering English to children in general and kindergarten students in particular. Teachers' performance on the language being taught is also a way to ascertain their qualification.

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