

ENGAGING TO NURTURING: ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT) STRATEGIES AND CONSTRAINTS FOR VERY YOUNG MUSLIM LEARNERS AT KINDERGARTEN

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Abstract

The use of the English language for very young learners in kindergarten has become fundamental in recent global teaching development, including in Aceh, Indonesia. Therefore, this qualitative research is aimed to discover the English language teaching strategies applied for very young Muslim learners' at Kiddos English School (KES) Kindergarten, Banda Aceh. The research participants were selected by using a non-probability sampling method. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview with four English teachers and participant observation was conducted in two classes of KES. The result of this study showed that KES teachers implemented at least seven strategies to teach English for their student's from engaging learners in daily oral language activity, to establishing a nurturing environment, playing games, storytelling, audio-visual, singing, and teaching face to face. Furthermore, the teachers faced four constraints in applying those strategies, which are: students' misbehavior, the inconsistency of students' attendance, lack of parental involvement, and the insufficient number of teachers.

Keywords: *Very Young Muslim Learners; ELT Strategies; Constraints; Kindergarten*

Abstrak

Penggunaan Bahasa Inggris untuk pelajar kanak-kanak (very young learners) di TK menjadi begitu penting di era perkembangan pendidikan dan pengajar sekarang ini, termasuk juga di Aceh, Indonesia. Oleh karena itu, penelitian kualitatif ini bertujuan untuk menemukan strategi-strategi pengajaran yang diterapkan dalam mengajar siswa-siswa TK pada Kiddos English School (KES) Banda Aceh. Objek dari penelitian dipilih dengan menggunakan metode 'non-probability sampling'. Selanjutnya, penelitian ini melibatkan empat guru bahasa Inggris untuk diwawancarai secara semi struktur. Observasi partisipan juga dilakukan di dua kelas pada TK Kiddos English School (KES). Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa guru-guru yang mengajar di TK Kiddos English School (KES) menerapkan sedikitnya tujuh strategi dalam mengajar bahasa inggris terhadap siswa-siswanya, yaitu: melibatkan siswa untuk menggunakan bahasa secara lisan, menciptakan suasana yang menyenangkan, bermain game, storytelling, audio-visual, menyanyi,

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dan mengajar siswa secara satu per satu (face to face). Dalam hal ini, guru menghadapi empat keterbatasan dalam menerapkan strategi-strategi tersebut, yaitu: kenakalan siswa, ketidakhadiran siswa, kurangnya keterlibatan orangtua, dan kurangnya jumlah guru.

Kata kunci: *pelajar kanak-kanak muslim, strategi ELT, keterbatasan, Taman Kanak-Kanak*

مستخلص

أصبح استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية لدى الأطفال في رياض الأطفال أساساً في تطوير التدريس العالمي حالياً، ومن صورها موجودة في آتشيهاندونيسيا. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى اكتشاف استراتيجيات تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لأطفال المسلمين في روضة الأطفال **Kiddos English School (KES)** في باندا آتشيه. وقد تم اختيار المشاركين في هذه الدراسة باستخدام طريقة أخذ العينات غير الاحتمالية. ثم قامت الباحثة بمقابلات شبه منظمة مع أربعة معلمين للغة الإنجليزية وملاحظة المشاركين في الفصلين الدراسيين. تشير نتائج هذه الدراسة إلى أن المعلمين لديهم سبع استراتيجيات في تدريسهم اللغة الإنجليزية لطلابهم؛ إشراك الطلاب في الأنشطة اللغوية اليومية لإنشاء بيئة مناسبة، ولعب الألعاب، ورواية القصص، والمشاهدة، والغناء، والتدريس عن طريق المباشر. وفي الوقت نفسه يواجه المعلمون أربعة عوائق في تنفيذ تلك الاستراتيجيات، وهي: سوء أخلاق الطلاب، وتهاونهم في الحضور والغياب، وقلة مشاركة أوليائهم، وقلة عدد المعلمين.

الكلمات الرئيسية: أطفال المسلمين؛ استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية؛ عوائق؛ روضة الأطفال

A. INTRODUCTION

As one of the most widely used languages in the global world today, it is important to introduce English to our generation from a very young age. One of the ways is by teaching the English language for the young learners at kindergarten school. In kindergarten or pre-school activities, they will be taught the basic level of English. It is now becoming seriously important since they naturally had a high curiosity and passion to explore the world around them. As Piaget's theory about children's cognitive development argue, very young learners are in the preoperational stage of intelligence.¹ They learned by using concrete materials like objects, pictures, stories, and videos.² Thus, learning a new language in a precise environment where they can learn through playing like in kindergarten school is very much compatible.

¹ J Huitt, W, and Hummel, "Piagets Theory of Cognitive Development.Pdf," 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbmt.2006.12.455>.

² Nuriye Degirmenci Uysal and Fatih Yavuz, "Teaching English to Very Young Learners," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 197, no. February (2015): 19–22, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.07.042>.

According to Chuang, children between 3 and 6 years old are at the peak age to be taught foreign languages.³ The problem is to teach very young learners the English language is a challenging task. In this light, Olga argues that children as young as 3-6 usually do not read or write yet, so that it is very intriguing for teachers to teach them English.⁴ Edelenbos, Johnstone and Kubanek argue that by using storytelling, the teaching language for very young learners may also contribute to their “individual language acquisition process” and address their “strengths and weaknesses”.⁵

Having talked about English language teaching certainly cannot be separated from the English language teaching strategy as an element that influences the situation of the learning process.⁶ It will help the teacher to conduct a thrilling teaching-learning environment. Besides, it is supposed to relieve some adversities in English language teaching. Consequently, the role of teaching strategies is very fundamental. For several reasons, Kersten and Rohde likewise claim that the objective of early foreign language teaching is principally “using English to learn it” instead of the old approach of “learning English to use it”.⁷

However, although there are multiple teaching strategies used in teaching the English Language for young learners, such as games⁸, songs and rhymes⁹, or drama¹⁰, there is no one size fits all approach. Teachers should always observe and pre-assess each student to determine which strategy is appropriate to be implemented for the teaching and learning process.¹¹

³ Mei-ling Chuang, “Teaching and Learning English in Kindergartens in Kaohsiung by A Dissertation Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Education) in The University of Bielefeld (Germany),” no. November (2001).

⁴ Olga Dolzhykova, “Teaching English through Storytelling to Young Learners Ukrainian and Norwegian Experiences,” 2014.

⁵ Peter Edelenbos, Richard Johnstone, and Angelika Kubanek, “The Main Pedagogical Principles Underlying the Teaching of Languages to Very Young Learners. Languages for the Children of Europe. Published Research, Good Practice and Main Principle,” *Final Report of the EAC 89/04, Lot 1 Study*, no. October (2006): 1–196.

⁶ M Marcellino, “English Language Teaching in Indonesia: A Continuous Challenge in Education and Cultural Diversity,” *TEFLIN Journal* 19, no. 1 (2008): 57–69, <https://doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v19i1/57-69>.

⁷ Kristin Kersten and Andreas Rohde, *Language Acquisition and Use in Multilingual Contexts*, ed. Anna Flyman Mattsson and Catrin Norrby, 2013.

⁸ Sahar Ameer Bakhsh, “Using Games as a Tool in Teaching Vocabulary to Young Learners,” *English Language Teaching* 9, no. 7 (2016): 120, <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n7p120>.

⁹ Shaheen Ara, “Use of Songs, Rhymes and Games in Teaching English to Young Learners in Bangladesh,” *Dhaka University Journal of Linguistics* 2, no. 3 (2009): 161–72, <https://doi.org/10.3329/dujl.v2i3.4150>.

¹⁰ erife Demircio lu, “Teaching English Vocabulary to Young Learners via Drama,” *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2010): 439–43, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.039>.

¹¹ M. Hellendrung, Angela, “English Language Learners: Effective Teaching Strategies, Classroom Environment and Technology Tool Use,” 2013.

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Since, the studies of specific English for Muslim young learners are limited. So far, it was mostly analyzed within the context of studying in non-Muslim English school setting, such as the one conducted by Ara, this article is then attempts to close this intellectual gap by offering to explain the actual account of very young Muslim learners in Aceh's kindergarten, a city situated at the northernmost corner of Indonesia.¹² Hence, the need to explore the very young learners English language teaching strategies, especially in the context of Aceh, where very young Muslim learners are now embracing English as their foreign language, is central to understand its challenges and constraints.

In terms of methodology, this qualitative study used participant observation and semi-structured interviews as instruments. The focus of the research is the very young learners aged about two out of five classrooms were observed for a week: Grape class and Pineapple class (students at age 5 years old). Also, there were four teachers interviewed; two of them are Grape class (Ms. E) and Pineapple class (Ms. R) teachers, one of them taught in Mango class (Ms. S), and the last one is the headmaster of KES (Ms. C).

B. DISCUSSION

1. Language Teaching Strategies

According to Cameron, making students familiar with the target language is vital, hence, engaging the target language in the classrooms routinely will help them to develop their language skills.¹³ Yet, it does not always fit all language learners. It is served merely as a tool, as stated by Heroman and Copple.¹⁴ They stated that often a teacher, "... tries one strategy, sees that it does not work, and tries something else".¹⁵ At the end of the day, it is constantly important in having variety of strategies to avoid failure in the teaching process.

Generally speaking, teaching English for a very young learner is a dare and a delight. They are naturally curious and imaginative. The teacher's role is not only preparing, arranging, and leading lessons that encourage interaction, but also setting-up classroom circles that are conducive to learning.¹⁶ Among so many concerns, teaching strategies which will be implemented in the classroom need some considerations, especially the learner's age. Klein

¹² Ara, "Use of Songs, Rhymes and Games in Teaching English to Young Learners in Bangladesh."

¹³ Lynne Cameron, *Teaching Languages to Young Learners.*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/56.2.201>.

¹⁴ Cate Heroman and Carol Copple, *K Today: Teaching and Learning in the Kindergarten Year*, ed. Dominic F Gullo, 1st ed. (Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2006).

¹⁵ Heroman and Copple.

¹⁶ Ariel Serrell Finlinson, "Second Language Teaching in the ESL Classroom : The Role of the Teacher" (Utah State University, 2016).

mentions that rather than adults, it is difficult for young learners sitting in the same manner for a long period; their mood tends to change in a short time, but they will be passionate if the subject is interesting.¹⁷ Therefore, there are some strategies that are typically used in teaching the English language for a very young learner. According to Tinarejo and Englander, some strategies that could be applied in teaching English are: build on students' prior literacy experiences, engage parents and families, engage learners in daily oral language activities, and establish a nurturing environment.¹⁸

2. Teaching English to Very Young Learners

According to Cameron, children aged 7-12-year-old are called young learners and children under age 7 are called very young learners, i.e. those going to kindergarten, attend pre-school activities and who are not yet started compulsory schooling.¹⁹ Furthermore, kindergarten students typically have a short span of focus, and teachers should be competent either to maintain students' attention or to retract their attention when during the process. Thus, "adaptive learning" skills in teaching very young learners is inevitable for the teachers.²⁰

Very young learners possess unique characteristics. As cited in De Carvalho, Roth said that very young learners are simply like normal children.²¹ They are fun, enthusiastic, energetic, noisy, imaginative, and always use their sense and quick to learn and to forget. In this sense, Pinter argues that favorable circumstances are fundamental in teaching young learners and facilitating their second language acquisition.²²

Children at the kindergarten stage are still in the silent period, a period where they should be introduced to basic skills input (listening and reading) before the time for production (speaking and writing).²³ It is similar to babies; when they were introduced a language by their parents and the parents try to talk to them, then they will express all of the

¹⁷ Kerstin Klein, "Teaching Young Learners" 43, no. 1 (2005): 12–17.

¹⁸ Guadalupe Tinajero and Karen Englander, "Bilingual-Intercultural Education for Indigenous Children: The Case of Mexico in an Era of Globalization and Uprisings," *Intercultural Education* 22, no. 3 (2011): 163–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2011.592019>.

¹⁹ Mary Slattery and Jane Willis, *English for Primary Teachers: A Handbook of Activities & Classroom Language*, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/56.4.429>.

²⁰ J. Enrique Agudo, Héctor Sánchez, and Mercedes Rico, "Adaptive Hypermedia and Adaptive Web-Based Systems," *Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, 2006, 393–97, <https://doi.org/10.1007/11768012>.

²¹ Raquel Cristina Mendes De Carvalho, "A Teacher's Discourse In EFL Classes For Very Young Learners: Investigating Mood Choices And Register," *Journal Of Chemical Information And Modeling* (Federal De Santa Catarina University, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1017/Cbo9781107415324.004>.

²² Annamaria Pinter, *Teaching Young Learners*, 2012.

²³ Al Ghada Yahya Kilani, "Kindergarten English Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Listening Strategies, Assessment Strategies And the Obstacles They Face" (2016).

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words they heard by facial expression. Next, they will be familiar with the language and then start to imitate what the parents said. It means, listening first before speaking.

Nevertheless, experts have different opinions regarding an exact age to learn a language and it is conclusively divided into three main opinions: “the younger the better”, “later is okay” and “it depends”. The first is a common opinion among experts which is “the younger the better”. They endorse this opinion since children at an early age will learn things rapidly, including a new language. They believe it is simpler to make children to be familiar with a new language at an early age. They said it is regrettable if children’s potency is not being developed properly at an early age.²⁴ Although this belief is sometimes considered as “myth” by some of the opponents, as it is more inclined to language ideologies instead of balanced and accurate knowledge.²⁵

In contrast, other experts also have a contradictory opinion. They hold on “later is enough”, that believed early age is time to play, they are apprehensive about cognitive (language) development that will disturb other aspects and functions, most importantly children personal and emotional development.²⁶ Rather than beginning to learn a new language, to master their mother tongue is the most important for children to let them grow and develop naturally. Silverberg and Samuel reveal that the effect of the age to second language acquisition and processing of second language words is very influential, especially for the late highly proficient L2 learners.²⁷

Apart from those opinions, there is another opinion that claims “it depends”, either early age or later has both positive and negative impacts.²⁸ She continues arguing that every learner has a different level of cognitive and different situations, some learners can learn both of new language and their mother tongue at the same time, other learners are not. Teachers should not deem all learners at the same cognitive level. For instance, some children start speaking at the age of six months and there are children who start speaking at the age of eight months. In her study, Muñoz, hence, suggests that the starting age of language learning does

²⁴ Gabriela Lojova, “Humanizing English Language Teaching in Slovakia,” *XLinguae* 9, no. 4 (2016): 30–36, <https://doi.org/10.18355/XL.2016.09.04.30-36>.

²⁵ T. Scovel, “*The Younger, the Better*” *Myth and Bilingual Education., Language Ideologies: Critical Perspectives on the Official English Movement*, 2000.

²⁶ Lojova, “Humanizing English Language Teaching in Slovakia.”

²⁷ Stu Silverberg and Athur G. Samuel, “The Effect of Age of Second Language Acquisition on the Representation and Processing of Second Language Words,” *Journal of Memory and Language* 51, no. 3 (2004): 381–98, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jml.2004.05.003>.

²⁸ Lojova, “Humanizing English Language Teaching in Slovakia.”

not matter if the amount of input in learning is similar from the beginning.²⁹ A similar argument put forward by Gürsoy and Akin that age was statistically insignificant across gender and does not make a learner better if they started learning language earlier.³⁰

Lojova also states that learners who live in the target language (new language) area have a larger opportunity to acquire the language in a short period than those who do not.³¹ When the learners live in the target language circles, they will use the language as often as possible. Certainly, it will help the learners to increase the target language faster. Likewise, the learners who are taught by teachers with a great qualification will be able to master the new language easily. Simply said, teachers' quality influences learners' learning process. To conclude, either at an early age or later age, teachers should know and analyze the learners' background before starting to teach a new language.

3. Strategies Applied in Teaching English Language

a. *Engaging Learners in Daily Oral Language Activities*

Language is a skill that needs practice as often as possible. If learners only learn by listening, reading, and writing it is not a guarantee that they can apply this skill effectively in daily life. By referring to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, learners acquire knowledge through interactions.³² When learners do not engage much in learning activities, they will not feel confident to express their thought and feeling such as asking a question, making a request, and interact with peers. Therefore, a teacher should build an intense interaction among students and confirm all students are capable to interact either with friends or teachers.

In this study, the teacher in Pineapple class and Grape class managed to get their students to communicate in English. They attempted to deliver the lesson and give instructions in English. Moreover, they did not only use English in the teaching process, but also in interacting with the learners outside the teaching-learning process. For example, Ms. R talked to the learners during break time and asked them daily questions such as:

²⁹ Carmen Muñoz, "Input and Long-Term Effects of Starting Age in Foreign Language Learning," *IRAL - International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* 49, no. 2 (2011): 113–33, <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.2011.006>.

³⁰ Esim Gürsoy and Feride Akin, "Is Younger Really Better? Anxiety about Learning a Foreign Language in Turkish Children," *Social Behavior and Personality* 41, no. 5 (2013): 827–42, <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2013.41.5.827>.

³¹ Lojova, "Humanizing English Language Teaching in Slovakia."

³² Shirley R Mackley, "Kindergarten Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies with English Language Learners : An Empirical Dissertation," 2009.

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“What fruits do you like?”

“Why don’t you eat a vegetable? It is good for your health”

Through this daily conversation, the learners become familiar with the English language. Even though some students still looked shy to give a response in English, but at least they understand what the teacher said.

b. Establishing a Nurturing Environment

A nurturing environment is a learning situation in which children learn the target language as natural as they learn their first language.³³ Teachers need to consider some aspects of creating a nurturing environment, such as school and classroom environment and teaching strategies that they use to deliver the lesson. Sheffler stated that, the students need enough space to move throughout the classroom.³⁴ Students, especially aged three until six years old are normally active learners. Hence, the classroom condition should be considered on their energetic movements like run and jump. Moreover, Sheffler also mentioned that the classroom decoration; the color choice is crucial to promote a sense of comfort.³⁵ They informed that instead red and orange, blue and green are better to make students feel calm.

Espinosa & Magruder, encouraged the design of the classroom to be emotionally conditioned.³⁶ Such warmth gives signals to children that they are worth and cared for; each child is respected, challenged, understood, and supported. This is necessary to make students feeling exist in the classroom, in which, they are free to express both their thought and their feeling. Children initially feel unfamiliar with a new environment; they are mostly being quiet and feeling unconfident. Therefore, the teacher should make them comfortable and stimulate them to participate in classroom activities.

During observation in Kiddos English School (KES) seems concerned about the learners’ enjoyment. It is proved by the learning environment which is colorful, spotless, and vast. The learners are freely running from room to room and enjoying schools facilities that provided by KES. Nevertheless, all activities are controlled by the teachers.

³³ Tinajero and Englander, “Bilingual-Intercultural Education for Indigenous Children: The Case of Mexico in an Era of Globalization and Uprisings.”

³⁴ Jessica L Bucholz EdD and Julie L Sheffler, “Electronic Journal for Inclusive Education Creating a Warm and Inclusive Classroom Environment: Planning for All Children to Feel Welcome,” *Number 4 Electronic Journal for Inclusive Education* 2, no. 4 (2009).

³⁵ Bucholz EdD and Sheffler.

³⁶ Linda M Espinosa and Elizabeth S Magruder, *Practical and Proven Strategies for Teaching Young Dual Language Learners Learning Outcomes What Are Best Practices When Teaching Young Dual Language Learners?*, 2008, http://www.earlychildhoodwebinars.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Chapter-4_Practical-and-Proven-Strategies-for-Teaching-Young-Dual-Language-Learners.pdf.

Then, there is an assessment board on the wall of each class. It is used to appreciate students' work by giving them a nice sticker on their hands and stick it on the board with their name on it. There is also no punishment if the students are still talking by using their mother tongue. Ms.C says:

“...let them try anything even though they make mistakes, so they will learn from mistakes. Let them to be creative, to explore, and to express themselves freely. The teacher's role is to be a platform. If the students do something wrong, we have to right them without hurt their self-confidence.”

Therefore, this strategy is like the one promoted by Tinajero and Englander for Mexican indigenous children in a bilingual setting.³⁷ As a result, it has made KES become a favorite kindergarten school among parents in Banda Aceh.

c. Playing Games

According to Tinajero and Englander, playing games is a kind of activity that increases learners' interaction in the classroom.³⁸ By applying this fun activity they will learn English without feeling bored and nervous. KES teachers said that the students are glad when they are invited to play games. They will be more confident to express themselves in the classroom.

During the interview session, Ms. R admitted that playing game is one of the strategies that she mostly uses in her class. She furthermore says:

“The students enjoy to play the game, when they are interested in the game and then, our objectives in teaching will be achieved easily”

It showed that playing games will build up students' motivation in learning so that the goals of teaching will easily attain. If the students feel glad, they will freely involve in the classroom activities and for sure make them feel more enthusiastic and participate without anxiety.³⁹

As Ms. C also believed that for kindergarten students, playing is their nature. The kindergarten teachers should understand it. It is not proper to force kindergarten students to learn seriously. She then explains:

“Because young learners, from zero to six, they just have to play. Do not burden them to study seriously, it is their characteristic”

³⁷ Tinajero and Englander, “Bilingual-Intercultural Education for Indigenous Children: The Case of Mexico in an Era of Globalization and Uprisings.”

³⁸ Tinajero and Englander.

³⁹ Sophie Ioannou-georgiou, “Teaching English to Very Young Learners : Using Games,” 2010.

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d. Storytelling

Storytelling was carried out by Ms. R in Pineapple class during the study observation. She used a puppet as equipment and it triggered the students to be more passionate in listening to the story. The students perhaps do not know all meaning of the words so that she was not using full English to tell the story. There was a moment when she translated some words or sentences to the Indonesian language or *Bahasa*. Thus, to attract the students and ease them to understand the story, she also used facial expressions, body gestures, and a great intonation. For example, when there was a sad part of the story, Ms. R pretended to cry, and when there was a happy scene, Ms. R put on a happy facial expression. Hence, storytelling is favored by children. Hence, Ms. R confirms:

“Actually to teach young learners in English there are so many strategies that you can use, for example, you can use singing a song, a picture, you can watch, you can play the game, then you can storytelling of course.”

She also adds:

“...they (students) like to listen to the story.”

Rosita, Apriliaswati, and Sumarni state that storytelling using puppets an interesting activity for Kindergarten students.⁴⁰ Therefore, this strategy is well-known among Kindergarten teachers. The strategy is also useful to improve students listening skills, and therefore, expand their vocabulary through meaningful and enjoyable short stories.⁴¹

e. Audio-Visual

Audio-visual is a teaching strategy that usually uses in teaching English. One of the English language teachers that used this strategy in KES was Ms. S. She maintains:

“I usually use audio-visual strategy in teaching because audio-visual makes students feel more interested to learn English”

It is showed that learning English by watching videos must be very attractive for Kindergarten students.⁴² It is also beneficial to make the students to be familiar with the English language directly from the native speaker. This is also advantageous for teachers

⁴⁰ Dian Rosita, Rahayu Apriliaswati, and Sumarni, “Introducing English To Kindergarten Students Through Storytelling With Puppet,” 2012, 1–14.

⁴¹ Aslı Özlem Tarakçio lu and Hatice Kübra Tunçarslan, “The Effect of Short Stories on Teaching Vocabulary to Very Young Learners (Aged 3-4-Year): A Suggested Common Syllabus,” *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2014): 67–84.

⁴² Ismail Çakir, “The Use of Video as an Audio-Visual Material in Foreign Language Teaching Classroom.,” *Tojet - The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology* 5, no. 4 (2006): 67–72.

who are not confident to pronounce the English language in the teaching-learning process.

f. Singing

It is not easy to teach Kindergarten students to be able to read English. The first step that teacher commonly uses in English reading classroom is by teaching the students how to read alphabets in English. When Pineapple class was being observed, Ms. R looked enthusiast in teaching the alphabet and spelling to the learners. She used a song to deliver the lesson. According to her, kindergarten students like to sing a song and they do not feel forced to learn and to memorize the lesson. As Ms. R says:

“...teaching vocabulary by singing makes the students can memorize the vocabulary easily... because they feel happy and they feel we are not studying, it happens unconsciously”

Tinajero and Englander stated that singing is an activity to encourage learners to engage comfortably in the classroom.⁴³ This is how kindergarten should be. The children can learn and having fun at the same time. Accordingly, students, as argued by Mansourzadeh, singing like in KES too, can improve their vocabulary bank.⁴⁴

g. Teaching Face to Face

Teaching Kindergarten students is challenging. Teachers need to know how to get and keep students' attention since they tend to lose their concentration very quickly. The children are easily disturbed by other things around them. Therefore, for Ms. E, teaching Math by using the English language in front of the classroom makes students difficult to understand the lesson. Thus, she chose to teach the students with face to face strategy whereby the students sit in a circle and the teacher teach them one by one. She explains:

“I choose a strategy in which children can stand alone. Rather than working in a pair or group, I prefer students to work individually”

She also adds that:

“...sometime they are bothered by their friends”

It shows Ms. E hoped that the teaching-learning process can go smoothly. She can maintain students' focus by applying this strategy and prevent unwanted things to happen. Although according to Gros, Garcia, and Escofet, the current generation are digitally

⁴³ Tinajero and Englander, “Bilingual-Intercultural Education for Indigenous Children: The Case of Mexico in an Era of Globalization and Uprisings.”

⁴⁴ Nurullah Mansourzadeh, “A Comparative Study of Teaching Vocabulary through Pictures and Audio-Visual Aids to Young Iranian EFL Learners,” *Journal of Elementary Education* 24, no. 1 (2014): 47–59.

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literate, face to face teaching for learners are not against the development of technology, since it can still be used in teaching with different contexts, ages, and challenges.⁴⁵

4. The constraints faced by teachers in applying ELT strategies in kindergarten

a. Students' Misbehavior

In general, the kindergarten classroom is usually very noisy. Most of the children like running, jumping, and chatting. They also like playing with their friends. Besides, some of the kindergarten teachers considered those all as constraints in the teaching-learning process. They are overwhelmed to tackle this problem. It will be easier if the students know the time to play and time to learn. However, playing and learning cannot be separated from kindergarten students. As stated by Roth as cited in Carvalho, enthusiastic, energetic, noisy, and like to speak are children's characteristics.⁴⁶ It makes kindergarten teachers difficult to manage the students during the teaching-learning process. It is also extremely challenging for them to create a well-structured activity in the classroom while the students also have different behaviors as mentioned by Mohammadi in his research.⁴⁷ Ms. E affirmed that students' misbehavior is one of the difficulties that she faced in KES. She ensures that:

"...each student has different behavior. Some of them learn quiet, but some of them are more active. So, sometimes they disturb their friends, and we as a teacher need to manage the class to make an effective learning classroom".

Nevertheless, although the students have different behavior, the teachers should be able to guide all students to follow the activities in the classroom. To handle students' misbehavior in the classroom, kindergarten teachers can apply a strategy used by Ms. E in Grape class; teaching face to face. Although it takes a lot of time, it will make the students more focused to learn English.

b. Inconsistency of Students' Attendance

The inconsistency of students' attendance is also a constraint for KES teachers in teaching English classroom. It is because children get sick easily; their self-durability

⁴⁵ Begoña Gros, Iolanda Garcia, and Anna Escofet, "Beyond the Net Generation Debate: A Comparison of Digital Learners in Face-to-Face and Virtual Universities," *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* 13, no. 4 (2012): 190–210, <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v13i4.1305>.

⁴⁶ Carvalho, "A Teacher's Discourse In Efl Classes For Very Young Learners: Investigating Mood Choices And Register."

⁴⁷ "Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods" 2, no. 1 (2012): 1–133.

(endurance) is different from adolescents and adults. Certainly, it influences their attendance in the classroom. The more often students absent, the more materials they leave. By perforce, the teachers should explain again the materials of the previous meeting in the next day so that all students can achieve the learning goals. On the contrary, some students will be bored if they learn the same thing over and over and other students will feel oppressed if they are forced to learn many materials in one day. Ms. S narrates:

“Because not all students come every day. For example, the students who are rare to attend school, then when they come to school they will be overwhelmed to follow the materials”

It indicated that children cannot learn a lot of things in a short time; they learn step by step. It is not proper if the teachers compel them in learning because they will feel stressed. It is like forcing them to swim in deep water meanwhile they even cannot swim yet. Of course, they will sink. Thus, teachers should know how much lesson kindergarten students can learn in a day. Another way is to increase the outdoor class schedules to enhance their emotional, social and even behavioral difficulties.⁴⁸

c. Lack of Parental Involvement

Tinajero and Englander say that the most important partner for school in children education is parents.⁴⁹ Parents' involvement in children's education will influence students' academic achievement. Parent's involvement can also foster their second language cognitive and affective development.⁵⁰ Children who are motivated by their parents generally have a great enthusiast for learning. However, not all KES students are encouraged by their parents in their academic progress. It affects their motivation and interest in learning. Ms. E complains:

“...another obstacle also comes from parents. Some parents do not really care about their children's development”

Therefore, parents and schools need to collaborate to help the children in learning. Both of them are expected to share information about the children. Besides giving a better effect on children in academic matters, a good relationship between parents and school is also beneficial to develop children's mental. Hiatt-Michael (2001) as cited in McDowell,

⁴⁸ Alan Price, “Improving School Attendance: Can Participation in Outdoor Learning Influence Attendance for Young People with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties?,” *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* 15, no. 2 (2015): 110–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2013.850732>.

⁴⁹ Tinajero and Englander, “Bilingual-Intercultural Education for Indigenous Children: The Case of Mexico in an Era of Globalization and Uprisings.”

⁵⁰ Rokita-Jas'kow Joanna, “Socioeconomic Status and Parental Involvement as Cognitive and Affective Factors Fostering Very Young Learners' Second Language Development,” *Language in Cognition and Affect, Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 2013, 189–201, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-35305-5>.

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Jack, and Compton stated that, parental involvement has also been related to fewer attendance issues and fewer behavioral problems in students.⁵¹

d. Insufficient Number of Teacher

The number of teachers in teaching kindergarten plays a significant role. One teacher in a classroom is insufficient for kindergarten classrooms while they were also demanded to do other things besides teaching. Consequently, it is also an obstacle that KES teachers faced. Ms. C laments that:

“Of course the administration itself, it is hard for me and also other teachers. They have to plan everything, and then teaching, and assessing at the same time, and also to capture the moment”

Ms. C hoped there will be two teachers in a classroom; one teacher focuses on teaching English and another one as the assistant. Also, Ms. C reiterates:

“...the students need to feel that they are always accompanied”

However, it will be a challenge for the teachers to adjust themselves in the classroom if they are forced to do many things at the same time. Ms. C then stresses that:

“...one teacher should focus on one duty only”

Therefore, teacher quantity needs to be considered to create a better learning classroom. One teacher should merely focus on one duty. It makes the teachers better at carrying out their duty, especially in teaching. It is also good for the students to get satisfactory attention from the teachers during the process. Paying serious attention to teacher perspectives is a must to improve the overall result of the teaching learning process.⁵²

C. CONCLUSION

This research has demonstrated some of the strategies applied in teaching the English language for very young learners at Kiddos English School (KES). The strategies are: engaging learners in daily oral language activity, establishing a nurturing environment, playing games, storytelling, audio-visual, singing, and teaching face to face. The seven

⁵¹ Kimberly McDowell, Ashlie Jack, and Meredith Compton, “Parent Involvement in Pre-Kindergarten and the Effects on Student Achievement,” *The Advocate* 23, no. 6 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.4148/2637-4552.1004>.

⁵² Wang Wei-pei, “Teaching English to Young Learners in Taiwan: Issues Relating to Teaching, Teacher Education, Teaching Materials and Teacher Perspectives,” *University of Waikato* (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2014.962779>.

strategies were applied because they are proper strategies for kindergarten students. They are suitable to the children's character and children's learning styles, too. As we know that, learning by playing is one of children's learning principles. It leads kindergarten teachers should provide fun teaching strategies. Furthermore, kindergarten is a place where children can learn and enjoy their childhood at the same time. Thus, KES teachers applied these seven strategies to teach English for their students.

Apart from the strategies that KES teachers provided in teaching English, there were some difficulties that they faced in applying them, which are: students' misbehavior, the inconsistency of students' attendance, lack of parental involvement, and the insufficient number of teachers. From the difficulties, it can be stated that teaching English for very young learners is not simple. The English materials for kindergarten students are perhaps easy, but to deliver the materials to the students is a very challenging task to do. The teachers should know how to inform the lesson to make the students can readily understand it. It encourages kindergarten teachers to be more patient and creative to deal with the constraints in teaching.

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