

TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS: THINGS THAT THE TEACHERS SHOULD CONSIDER

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ABSTRACT:

Teaching English to young learners is challenging to the English teachers because young learners have difference point of view and character. Even though it looks so easy to teach English to young learners, the teachers should not underestimate some aspect before teaching young learners, therefore this article discusses about three aspects that should be considered by the teachers when they teach English to young learners, those are; the strategy when they teach, the characteristics of young learners and the classroom management.

Keywords: teaching strategy, YL characters, classroom management

Introduction

Indonesia has new curriculum for its education namely K-13, where the English subject is compulsory from junior school meanwhile English is as local content for elementary school. Even though English is only extra-subject in elementary school, the enthusiastic of elementary school students are high in learning English. This phenomena can be seen from the elementary school in Indonesia, almost all the elementary schools put English in their curriculum. Meanwhile looking at phenomena about English course in Indonesia, the English teaching also

learned and the number of young learners in that English course also increases. Furthermore, teaching English to young learners is different from that to adults in a way that they are often more enthusiastic, lively learners, and learn the target language faster than adults. The experienced teacher plays important roles to construct successful lessons and activities which place the students at the very heart of teaching and learning. By understanding some techniques and characteristics of the young learners, the teacher can deliver a right material to them then it will be useful to reach

the objective of teaching and learning particularly English to young learners.

Discussion

1. Teaching English to Young Learners

The successful student in learning English stems from English teacher competences in designing classroom activities and in implementing an appropriate strategy in teaching English. In addition, the strategy for young learners also plays important role in order that the learners can participate actively in teaching and learning process at the classroom, therefore the teachers should be able to find a right strategy in teaching English to young learners. Teaching strategy can help students' curiosity about what they are learning. Brown (2001:2018) called that strategic investments will make students their own learning process. Meanwhile, in designing and creating a good and communicative situation at the class, the teacher should follow the communicative principle proposed by John and Morrow (1983: 60-64) as follows.

- a. Know what you are doing.
- b. The whole is more than the sum of the parts.

c. The processes are as important as the forms.

d. To learn it, do it.

In addition, Colker (2012) suggested that teacher should have sense of humor to attract students' attention. Sense of humor must not only be presented in form of teaching activities or teacher's behavior but also in form of teaching materials. Learning while playing then becomes a brilliant idea to teach young learners for everything children do should make them fun.

2. Characteristics of Young Learners

Teaching to young learners quite differs from teaching adults. They have different characteristics and also the way of learning. Therefore to teach young learners effectively, English teachers must know their students' characteristics and also understanding the benefit of young learners in learning English. By understanding students' characteristics, the teachers will be easily communicate with the students, as the result the teacher can deliver the materials in a class easily. Rubin&Thompson cited in brown (2000:123) summarized 14 learners' characteristic. The said a good language learner:

1. find their own way, taking charge of their learning
 2. Organize information about language
 3. Are creative, developing a “feel” for the language by experimenting with its grammar and words
 4. Make their own opportunities for practice in using the language inside and outside the classroom
 5. Learn to live with uncertainty by not getting flustered and by continuing to talk or listen without understanding every words
 6. Use mnemonics and other memory strategies to recall what has been learned
 7. Make errors work for them and not against them
 8. Use linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of their first language, in learning a second language
 9. Use contextual cues to help them in comprehension
 10. Learn to make intelligent guesses
 11. Learn chunk of language as wholes and formalized routines to help them perform “beyond their competence”
 12. Learn certain tricks that help to keep conversations going
 13. Learn certain production strategies to fill in gaps in their own competence
 14. Learn different styles of speech and writing and learn to vary their language according to the formality of situation
- Meanwhile, deal with the characteristics of young learners, here Scott and Ytreberg (1993: 3-4) propose some general young language learners’ characteristics as follows:
- a. Their basic concepts are formed. They have decided views of the world.
 - b. They can tell the difference between fact and fiction.
 - c. They ask questions all the time.
 - d. They rely on the spoken word as well as the physical world to convey and understand meaning.
 - e. They are able to make some decisions about their own learning.
 - f. They have definite views about what they like and don’t like doing.
 - g. They have developed sense of fairness about what happens in the classroom and begin to question the teacher’s decisions.
 - h. They are able to work with others and learn from others.

Other characteristics related to young language learners that Scott and Ytreberg (1993: 2) state are as follows.

- a. They know that the world is governed by rules. They may not always understand the rules but they know that they are there to be obeyed and the rules help to nurture a feeling of security.
- b. They understand situations more quickly than they understand the language used.
- c. They use language skills long before they are aware of them.
- d. Their own understanding comes through hands, eyes, and ears.
- e. They are very logical –what the teachers say first happens first.
- f. They have very short attention and concentration span.
- g. Children do not always understand what adults are talking about.
- h. Young children cannot decide for themselves what to learn.
- i. Young children love to play.
- j. Young children are enthusiastic and positive about learning.

From the characteristics of the children above, it can be conclude that the teacher plays important roles in teaching and learning process. The teacher can select an appropriate

method and materials for their students. The teacher should also be able to make an appropriate activities in the class based on the children characteristics.

3. Classroom management

There are many factors that determine the success of teaching and learning process, two of them are classroom management and the classroom situation. If the teacher can manage a good and conducive classroom, the result of teaching and learning process will be good. The teachers play important role in this case, therefore the teachers should have things that Scott and Ytreberg suggest as follows:

a. Abilities

a skillful and creative teacher is needed. An English teacher to young learners is not only teach monotonously, but also be able to sing songs, tell stories, and organize worksheet so that the classroom atmosphere seems interesting.

b. Attitudes

The teachers should respect to all students equally, in other word the teacher should be fair to all, the students. No differentiate among the students.

c. Helping the students feel secure

Security is needed by the students; security will help the students get the materials maximally.

These points below make the students feel secure.

- 1) The students know what is happening, and they need to feel that the teacher is in charge.
- 2) The teacher shows respect to the students.
- 3) The teacher listens to whatever the students say —mistakes as well.
- 4) The teacher does not mind the students' getting things wrong and tell them that everyone makes mistakes when he is learning a new language.
- 5) The teacher establishes routines by greeting the students at the beginning of classes, for example.
- 6) The teacher gives the students responsibility for doing either theoretical or practical jobs in the classroom.
- 7) The teacher avoids organizing the competition in the classroom.
- 8) The teacher avoids giving physical rewards or prizes that make the students be jealous with one another.

9) The teacher does not give the students English names.

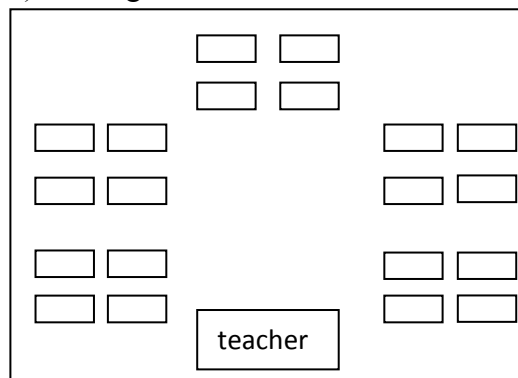
d. The physical surrounding

a class should be colorful, the teachers should put some pictures, posters, etc. Young learners will pay more attention to what they see surround them. By attaching posters and pictures in the class, they will easily know some English vocabularies.

e. Arrangement of the desks and chairs

It is suggested that the desks and chairs are moveable, so that the teacher can arrange the chair easily. The students sometime get bored when they are studying. Therefore by changing the desk arrangement, it is hoped that the students do not feel bored and the atmosphere in the class will more alive. There are several models of the arrangement of desks and chairs according to their purposes. Here are some of the examples.

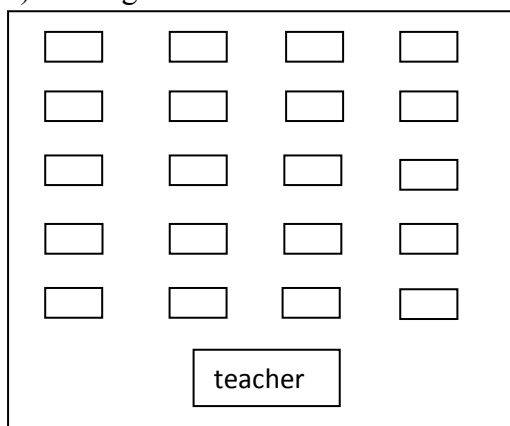
1). Arrangement Model A



The advantages of this model are as follows.

- a) The teachers can be able to teach the whole class easily.
- b) The students can be able to work in groups of four.
- c) The students can be able to work in pairs.
- d) The space can be used by the teacher to conduct game
- e) The students can be able to learn together.

2). Arrangement Model B



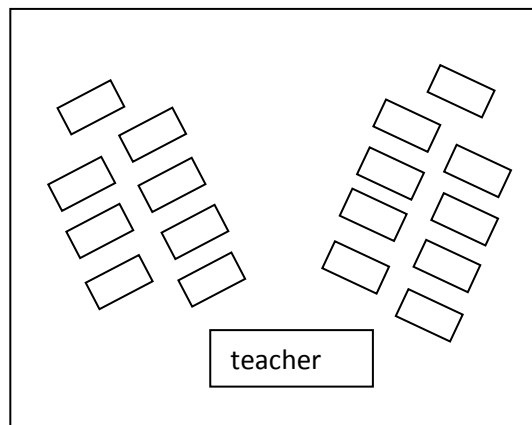
The advantages of this model are as follows.

- a) The students can be able to focus in studying. They work individually.
- b) It makes it possible to work in pairs with the classmates in front or behind them.

The weakness is that the students cannot communicate each other and the teacher finds it difficulties in designing

a group discussion. There is no enough space; it is difficult for the teacher to design activities like game.

3). Arrangement Model C



The arrangement of this model (C) has the same strength and weakness as model B but this model is more flexible because it has a space in the middle.

f. Grouping the students

The students in the class have different characteristics. Therefore the teacher needs to consider enough socialization among them. It can be done by arranging the desks as in model A. With the students occupying the arrangement model A, grouping can be done either in pairs or in groups. In making groups, the students are not allowed to choose the members of their groups themselves because it takes a long time. The clever students are spread into all groups in order that they can help those who are not so clever.

The members of each group are three to five students.

g. Classroom Language

The English teachers to young learners in elementary school should communicate with the students in English as much as possible so that, gradually, the students are able to comprehend. While the teachers are communicating with the students, it is necessary to use language chunks, i.e., phrases having complete meaning (meaningful phrases) as what has been discussed above. The examples are "I'm sorry", "I don't know" or "I don't understand" (Scott and Ytreberg, 1993: 8–18).

From the explanation above, the teacher should be able to decorate their class as comfort as possible to the students, change the desk arrangement to avoid the boredom, act as fair as possible, make the students feel secure in the class, try to be like their mother at home. The teacher can accompany them playing, singing, or even dancing together. That's all of course for the purpose of reaching the goal of teaching and learning.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, I can conclude that the teacher should

understand how to teach English for young learners, the teacher should be creative and understand more about the learners, in this case is young learner because teaching English to young learners is quite different. Therefore the teacher should at least consider about three aspect, those are strategy in teaching YL, characteristics of YL and Classroom Management.

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