

## TEACHING ENGLISH FOR KINDERGARTEN: PROBLEMS AND NEEDS FROM TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

Wisma Yunita<sup>1</sup> and Gita Mutiara Hati<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Bengkulu (Indonesia)

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Bengkulu (Indonesia)

Corresponding author e-mail: wismayunita@unib.ac.id; gitamutiara@unib.ac.id

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**Abstract.** Teaching English to children effectively requires teachers to creatively design lessons with various materials, media and attractive activities. In doing so, teachers may face several problems that can hinder them to be creative. This paper discusses problems encountered by the kindergarten teachers and their needs in teaching the language. It is a need analysis part of an ongoing developmental research on English material for kindergarten students involving 15 Core Kindergarten teachers in Bengkulu city. The data was collected by using a questionnaire. The result shows that the problems are: 1) there are no official materials designed for teaching English to kindergarten students; 2) limited media availability and teachers' limited skills in using the media; 3) ineffective teaching and learning activities. As for the needs, the teachers expect to have: 1) English materials designed based on children's daily life with interesting pictures and completed with glossary and ways of pronouncing the words; 2) simple and attractive media of learning such as flash card; 3) learning activities involving motoric skills such as singing songs, bolding letters and playing games; 4) themes introducing science in general and the local culture.

**Keywords:** English for kindergarten, materials, media, teaching and learning activities, themes

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### INTRODUCTION

The government of Indonesia has launched a great educational target for 2045 that is to create a golden generation at its 100 years of independence. To reach the target, the government starts it by preparing the current children age 4-6 years old with good program in education, instilling good characters in lessons and letting the children learn foreign languages.

One of the foreign languages is English with its complexity in the process of teaching it to children in regard to their attention span and their knowledge of abstract and concrete things.

In the process of teaching the language to the children, there are many factors needed to be considered including the teaching materials, the media and the learning activities for each lesson.

In regard to teaching materials for the kindergarten students, unfortunately, there is no official material yet providing by the government (Yunita and Hati, 2015). Most kindergartens use commercial materials sold at bookstores which is not based on the real current needs of the students and the teachers at the kindergartens.

In order to design the teaching materials, the media and the learning activities that fulfill the needs of the students and the teachers, firstly it should be done based on a need

analysis. Need analysis according to Richards (2001) is a procedure used to collect information about learners' need. It can be seen from the teachers, the learners and the situation (Nation and Macalister, 2010). This need analysis is seen from the teacher's point of view since kindergarten students do not yet understand what they need in learning English language.

Nation and Macalister (2010) suggest the focus of the analysis is on the lacks (current condition and the problems in teaching language to the children) and the wants (the teacher's hopes and wishes in regard to the teaching and learning process). Meanwhile, the necessities is determined by referring to the theories and the policy set by the government on teaching English to kindergarten students in Indonesia.

In this paper, the discussion will reveal the problems and needs from the teachers' point of view on the process of teaching English to students of Kindergarten B (aged 5-6) especially in Bengkulu city. The urgency of finding out the problems and the needs is as the starting point in designing an English teaching material for Kindergarten students aged 5-6 years old or the very young learners.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Teaching English for Kindergarten

Teaching English for Kindergarten or very young learners aged less than 7 years old is not easy. They have short attention span and are very active. This is in line to Shin (2011) who mentions that the young learners of English have the following characteristics; loud, hyper, can't sit still, too talk active and easily distracted, fun, social, curious, energetic and spontaneous.

In addition, Hashemi (in Hashemi and Azizinezhad, 2011) believes that teaching to children is a delicate and sensitive task because children; (1) are highly motivated and energetic, (2) are new sponges to absorb, (3) have various language back grounds, (4) are easily frustrated if corrected immediately, (5) are ready to imitate and participate, (6) love group work, (7) love independence, (8) need respect and attention, (9) easily learn from their environments, and (10) are great competitors. Due to those character possessed by children, the teacher should consider them in designing a lesson and teaching English language to children.

Moreover, based on the *Methodological guide of teaching English in a kindergarten* published by the Research Institute of Education in Prague (in Klimova, 2013), there are ten rules of thing that should be kept when teaching English to children; (1) ability to understand, (2) exploitation of games and movement, (3) indirect teaching,

(4) development of imagination, (5) activation of all senses, (6) changing of activities, (7) reinforcement, (8) individual approach, (9) use of native language, and (10) use of positive motivation.

In further, Shin (2011) adds several ways of teaching the young learners such as trying to imitate the L1 environment, teaching the language in context, teaching grammar implicitly, creating an English speaking environment in the class and making English fun.

Aside from those rules and ways of teaching language to children, the successful language teacher of English should possess several characteristics in order to make the teaching and learning of English to children become effective and meaningful. The characteristics are; (1) be energetic, (2) love children, (3) pay attention to individual differences, (4) be encouraging, (5) let children see the beautiful and useful aspects of the language, (6) let them love you as the language teacher and the new language as well, (7) know the techniques of teaching, (8) respect children as human and (9) start teaching children as soon as possible (Hashemi and Azizinezhad, 2011).

Above all those characteristics, a successful English language teacher should also possess the ability to plan, design and implement the lesson in the classroom creatively and meaningfully.

### Designing English Lessons for Kindergarten Students.

In designing an English lesson or a unit of instruction, there are some factors that need to be considered so that the aims of the lesson can be achieved. Milkova (2016) states that the key components of a lesson that a teacher should consider are the learning objectives, the teaching and learning activities, and the strategies to check student understanding.

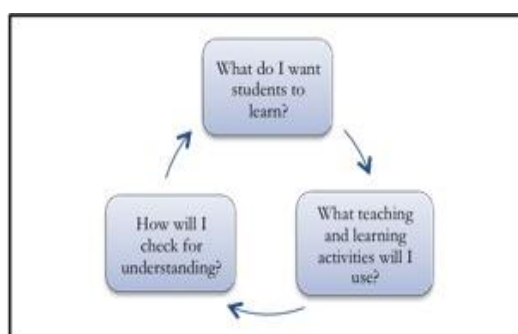


Figure 1. Key Components in Lesson Planning (Milkova, 2016).

In addition, according to The Open Resource Bank for Interactive Teaching University of Cambridge Website (2015), effective and experienced teachers consider the following factors when designing lessons; learning objectives and intended outcomes,

pedagogic approaches (teaching models), teaching and learning strategies and techniques and conditions for learning (climate for learning or classroom organization).

Those opinions above are seen from the teachers' point of view; meanwhile, from the kindergarten students' point of view what they need is a joyful learning with games and a lot of interesting activities. Therefore, the lesson should be carefully designed which comprised of mainly interesting materials, media and learning activities.

### **Material, Media and Learning Activities**

Very young learners (age less than 7 years old) are active learners. They love learning activities which stimulate their curiosity and involving body movement such as playing games, singing songs and storytelling. To meet such learning activities, the teachers should prepare an active, creative, innovative, effective and fun learning process. Such learning process needs appropriate learning materials, media and learning activities. Some sources of materials for learning are English books or module, encyclopedia, storybooks and magazine while the media can be a rods, flannel boards, and videos. In further, the learning activities can be singing a song, drawing and matching pictures, and bolding letters.

In preparing those materials, media and learning activities, the teachers may find difficulties and limitations which will make the needs getting far from the ideal condition of the teaching and learning process. The difficulties and the limitation become the problems. The problems and needs can be seen from the teachers' perspectives as the kindergarten student cannot yet give opinions or think about such things.

### **METHOD**

In conducting the research, a descriptive qualitative design was employed. A set of questionnaire was developed to find out teachers' problems and needs related to the material, media, and teaching activities. It consisted of fourteen items, both closed and open ended types of question. The participants involved in this study were English teachers from fifteen Core Kindergartens in Bengkulu City. The samples were selected randomly from each district in the city. The data was then analyzed qualitatively.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Findings from this study show the teachers problems and needs regarding the material, media, and the teaching activities.

#### **Teachers' Problem**

The main problem dealing with the material was there are no official materials designed for teaching English to kindergarten students yet. Thus, it requires teachers to develop their own teaching materials. However, the fact that almost all English teachers in kindergartens are not from English Education background makes it difficult for them to develop English teaching materials. As they come mostly from the Early Childhood Education Program, they were certainly provided with the practical and theoretical knowledge in developing materials, but it was not for English language teaching. Developing teaching materials requires a teacher who fully understands about the subject itself. Therefore, it creates a problem in the teaching English for kindergarten.

Another problem was that the available English teaching materials were not suitable with children language development. Some were found to be too difficult as the vocabularies were too abstract and not very close to the students' daily life. While in English language teaching, it is recommended to start with concrete words (Caramelli, Setti, & Maurizzi, 2004).

In addition, the teachers often find the available materials were not very attractive and lack of character building content. One way to develop character is to consider integrating local culture content in the materials (Sudartini, 2012). The other problem was the lack of official standard for materials to be taught in kindergarten level. School curriculum in Indonesia does not require kindergartens to insert English as a compulsory subject; therefore schools which decide to teach English to their students have problems in designing English teaching and learning lessons.

As for the media, problems occurred due to the limited availability of the media at the school. Some schools actually provide some media, but the teachers were not very skillful in optimizing them. Two of the schools even suffered from the total lack of media availability for English language learning. It is not surprising as English is not yet compulsory in Early Childhood Education Curriculum. However, there is no doubt that teachers are very aware of the importance of media, especially in introducing a new language. Just like any other teaching and learning process, media primarily help young learners to stay focus and increase their active engagement (Smaldino, Lowther, & Russel, 2008).

Aside from the material and media, the teachers also experience problems related to the teaching activities. The teaching and learning activities are not run well as they are expected. The teachers admitted that they were not creative enough to design various teaching and learning activities. It was likely because they did not come from English Education major. Meanwhile, designing a good English lesson for kindergarten students requires a teacher who not only know about the principles in early childhood education, but also a teacher who possesses a very good knowledge about how to manage

meaningful English language teaching activities in a classroom. Hence, she will be able to design an English lesson which will help delivering the materials effectively.

The situation that most schools do not have a real English teacher is because English is not required in kindergarten curriculum. Despite that fact, the schools are aware that they need to introduce English to the students. One way to do that is to ask one of the available teachers to teach English even though she is not from English Education. It is also due to the fact that the schools do not have enough funds to hire an English teacher.

Another problem that the teachers often dealt with was when it came to the pronunciation. It was very difficult for the teacher to make students imitate the correct sounds in English. This problem is similar to what Copland, Garton, & Burns (2014) have found out. From the survey involving 4,459 English teachers worldwide, it was found that most teachers stated it was difficult to teach good, correct, and perfect pronunciation. However, they stayed on using the target language since they believe that learners should aim for native-like pronunciation. This problem again occurred because the teacher is not a real English teacher.

In addition, when the students were asked to write the words in English, they often do wrong. For example, when the students are asked to write 'cat', they will write it 'ket', based on the sound of the word. It is very common, however, to have problem like this in teaching English as a foreign language. The students' mother tongue affects their target language learning, widely known as L1 interference, is unavoidable especially for children who do not have much exposures to the target language. Therefore, the lack of substantial knowledge of lexical and grammatical structures and aspects of the target language cause the learners to face some difficulties in learning target language (Sinha, et al., 2009).

### **Teachers' Needs and Expectations**

Teachers' needs dealing with the materials are the English materials designed based on children's daily life with interesting pictures and completed with glossary and ways of pronouncing the words. In addition, they also expected to have English material in sequenced themes which were appropriate for students' level of development. The chosen themes better be the ones which were close to children's daily life (Council of Local Authorities for International Relations, 2013) in order to give the students relevant experience (Paradis, Kirova, & Dachyshyn, 2009). Moreover, the teachers also expected to have teaching materials with character building content and accompanied with appropriate English songs.

Meanwhile, for the teaching media, almost all of the participants of this study expected for simple and attractive media of learning. Attractive means the media can catch students' attention and help teachers to convey messages effectively. The media

should also be safe for the children. Safety is needed because usually students are eager to touch whatever things they are shown. Even sometimes they hold it long enough to satisfy their curiosity. Therefore, the media should be safe for them. The last expectation for the media is that the teachers expect to have special flash cards which can be utilized for different purposes.

The needs were not only for materials and media, but also for the teaching activities. The teachers expected to be able to teach English using songs, games, and storytelling. Those activities encourage students' active involvement as and most importantly they are surely fun for the students. Fun and playful activities is believed to promote best results in teaching English to children (California Department of Education, 2009). However, designing teaching activities with games is not as simple as it seems. The study conducted by Chu (2014) shows that designing games are the difficult parts for instructors while preparing a lesson. It is because teachers need to have clear concept about cognitional and psychological development in order to fit the students' needs and interests.

Finally, the participants stated that they also need to teach English with themes that are different from the previous ones and introduce science in general and the local culture. The expected themes were *Plants, Water Air and Fire, Communication Tools, My Country, Recreation, and Universe*.

## RECOMMENDATION

It is obvious that though it is highly recommended to start foreign language teaching as early as possible, there are in fact some unavoidable problems occur. However, the problems faced by the teachers are very urgent to be identified as the information could be used as the basis for creating more effective English lesson. Problems and needs from the teachers' perspective are also very crucial in helping develop appropriate English language teaching materials.

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