



## **Preserving the Uniqueness of English Teaching at Early Childhood Education: Teacher Perspectives**

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**Abstract:** The way of early childhood (ECE) teachers in introducing English to their students often seems to be unique. With a limited knowledge and skill, they have to be competent English practioners. The learning outcome might not be optimal as the parents expected. The writer has raised questions regarding what early childhood teachers should know and the skills they need to teach English in early childhood education. This identified need was able to be the basic consideration to help the early childhood teachers have capacity of teaching appropriately. The researcher findings drawn on the questionnaire distributed to 31 early education teachers in Ponorogo. Data findings showed that even though their education backgrounds were not suitable with the subject they teach, they will welcome conveniently the offered breakthrough. They were open to receive any programs to enhance their capacities of teaching skills and attributes they require or knowledge they need..

**Keywords:** Preserving, Uniqueness, Early childhood education

### **1. Introduction**

English to young learners mainly in some early childhood educations (ECE) in Indonesia is already formally introduced by the teachers. However, Rahmat (2010) explicitly stated that even today many countries in the world, including Indonesia, have started learning foreign languages, especially English, Mandarin or Arabic as foreign languages in early childhood the results are not satisfactory. They have not been able to express it in daily life. Their needs are still limited to getting score rather than the communicative competence. It might be caused by the teacher's readiness to teach on English as what have said by Copland, Garton, and Burns (2014) that one of the most complex of the policy decisions affecting young learner classrooms concerns pedagogy. They admitted through informal interview that they feel less confident and are not able to carry out learning in accordance with expectations. Most of them said that they did not have an English education background. With this condition, it will certainly be a problem both from the pedagogical and linguistic aspects. It was very unique. By reason of the school prestige, English was introduced with some restrictiveness on the human resources. It, of course, is going to be a heavy burden for early childhood teachers who have limited knowledge and skill to teach it. Consequently, the teaching might not be optimal which lead the children tend to be less happy and find it difficult to learn English.

As we all have known that in this era of mastering foreign languages, especially English, is a very important requirement. Various fields of work such as trade, industry, transportation, and others have used English as a means of communication in order to establish networks with a wider range. Moreover, the presence of the internet which uses more English has made it a communication medium that can help them to develop and maintain their business to the maximum extent amid intense competition. You hear it on television spoken by politicians from all over the world. Wherever you travel, you see English signs and advertisements. Whenever you enter a hotel or restaurant in a foreign city, they will understand English, and there will be an English menu. (Crystal, 2003).

Linked to the issue of the teachers' pedagogy, although they have limited knowledge of teaching techniques, unlikely they were forced to own the power to choose a variety of learning models that are appropriate to the abilities and learning styles of early childhood and in a happy and comfortable atmosphere. According to Haenilah (2015) the role of early

childhood education is not only as a teacher but as a model, figure, or role model that every day is seen, heard and imitated by children. Learning must be able to provide an environment that is rich in sensory stimulation so that all potential children can develop optimally. Young learner, those attending preschool or kindergarten will not have any personal reason for studying English. At this point they may not know or comprehend how important these classes can be. They might view the class as simply an other fun daily activity and that is just fine. Therefore, to get better target of English learning, teachers should keep everything as simple and short as possible. The students do not have long attention spans and easily distracted. They also must be aware of the challenges and difficulties they may encounter, and prepare accordingly.

This paper will describe evidently the real responses of the early childhood teachers related to the readiness on introducing English to their students. Identifying the needs of the early childhood education teachers finally is important in supporting the efforts to develop English effectively. China has learnt from the best advances in early childhood education curriculum studies around the world and is now moving to a position where local conditions and Chinese research will help advance reform. (Fan, et.al, 2016). In the context of Indonesian, it is in line with Suyanto's proposal (2007) in which the substance of foreign / second language learning activities included competencies and language skills such as listening, speaking (speaking), reading (reading), and writing (writing). These skills are taught integratively and integrated with what happens in everyday life. The concepts that need to be mastered by children in language are 1) identification (getting to know people / objects around children), 2) classification (grouping, for example color, shape, size, number, function, type, etc. .), 3) spatial (space or position of people / objects), 4) temporal (time), 5) emotional (feelings), 6) familial (family), 7) ordering (composing), and 8) equivalence (comparison) .

Another alternative solution is that relates to the method / method / strategy employed by the teacher in introducing foreign languages in early childhood. Moon (2000) proposed some teaching techniques can be adopted such as: 1) naturally, the same as the way they learn mother tongue, 2) children need to be motivated and distimulus, 3) activities that are listening and repeating repeat, 4) activities by imitating the teacher, 5) activities by interacting with others, and activities that translate from mother tongue to foreign language and vice versa. Davison (nd) in Harmanto (2015) also suggests that educators can change the way they teach by creating activities as follows: creating Web quests, creating technology-based simulations , reduce lecture time, increase discussion, provide ready-to-use internet, design group work, create Inquiry based learning models, teach a little memorization of many interactions, and apply blog or Wikipedia classes. In addition, Shin (2006) gave another recommendation about the appropriate and relevant methods / strategies can teacher use in the process of learning foreign languages for early childhood such as 1) using gestures and flashcards, 2) using games, 3) using music, songs, and chants, 4) using dance and movement, 5) using dialogue, dama, and poetry, 6) using stories and storytelling, 7) using crafts and activities, 8) project work, 9) using technology in the classroom, and 10) pair and group work. It should be noted in conducting foreign language learning activities for early childhood so that learning can achieve the objectives as expected: 1) complement learning activities with visual media, realia and movements and a combination of spoken language with 'body language' or 'demonstration' For example, a teacher wants to give vocabulary about animals. Then the teacher must show a picture or doll in the shape of an animal. With that it will be faster captured and understood by children. He underlines that the activities teacher plan have 1) involving children in making visual media or realia, 2) moving from one activity to another with fast, 3) building routines in the classroom using English, 4) using mother tongue when needed, 5) teaching based on themes and stimulating children's imagination and creativity, 6) using stories and contexts that are already known to children, 7) invite the surrounding community (parents, students, etc.) who can speak English to report in the classroom, 8) collaborate with other teachers in your school, and 9) communicate with the teacher or instructor for other early childhood outside of school?

It must be in the early childhood education teachers' mindset that when children enters preschool or kindergarten, they may not know English, but they have much experience using language. Learning to English all day with uninteresting method might be exhausting. Therefore, kindergarten or ECE teachers should encourage them by providing various approaches. It is also important for the teacher to engage and interact with children when they introduce a foreign language. The teacher can make significant observations about children's adjustment, interactions with other children, use of classroom materials, and development of concepts during these times. It is one of the ways to preserve the ECE teachers to cultivate a positive attitude to children who have very little English.

## **2. Literature Review**

Relevant literature shows that teaching English to young learners are intended for one goal. It is to introduce them to the English language and hence exposing them the language since early time. This statement is supported by the fact that there are many benefits as why we need to make children learn English as early as possible. Oyama (1976) argues that before children reach puberty they have higher possibility to acquire native-like proficiency in a language they are learning. This thought is usually accepted by adults by saying that children could "pick up" a language easily. Moreover (Marinova-Todd, Marshall & snow, 2000, p10) concluded that young learners are the best and efficient learners in language. This is because they have already mastered their native language and they can also learn second language.

To add more reason, **Read (2003)** states that learning language early is supported by the fact that children have grandiose amount of time to learn new things especially a new language. Adults may not have as much times as kids as they have something else to do. **Curtain and Dahlberg (2010)** state that if children learning journey begins in early time it can provide them more practice and as a result can give them more experience and this will lead to greater fluency in the language they are learning.

As we are diving into globalization and the world seems smaller and more connected than before. Children will have the chance and opportunity to take part into the global stage. By learning a new language they can obtain knowledges and as a result they will learn to appreciate other languages and cultures. This will make them to become more aware of their own culture and language. Based on the statement above it can be concluded that learning a new language does not mean that one will lose his or her local identity, but it encourages them to be more aware of one's identity.

By learning a second language it can provide many advantages for childrens' brains. Even when the young learners only speak one or two languages can impact the way childrens' think and behave. (**Bialystok, 1999**) argues that when young learners are able to speak another language it provides several advantages. One of them is mental flexibility which means the ability to see a problem from different perspectives. Children can also increase their self awareness. **Marsh (2000)** also stated that by using different languages even if it is not used much or used modestly can yield a positive effect on childrens' way of thinking. They will be able to see phenomenon from different point of views the way they use different languages. It will have a very interesting outcome on their ability to think and understand about things.

This paper also discusses about the children who learn a foreign language, in this context English. **Cameron (2018)** stated that teachers should not compare children to adults or teenagers. Teaching children has different approaches and methods and of course the earlier we introduce English to the children the better they can master the language. in her book **Cameron** argues that the difference of teaching children and adolescent are immensely obvious. Children still have no fear and self conscious in the learning processes and that means they do not afraid of making mistakes. Mistakes are usually scary and embarrassing for us adults but they are very brave to speak up their minds. They are also tend to communicate with native-like accent since they learn English intuitively and by association through trials and errors rather by using grammar, drills, or discourse methods.

The upside of teaching English to young learners are also stated by **Piaget** Children are fast in capturing and processing everything in the world that surrounds them. This as a result can influence their mental and language development. They are active learners which means that they solve problems by taking action. That is why children tend to be curious with virtually everything going on around them and they want to find the answers as soon as possible.

Meanwhile **Vygotsky** views childrens' development and learning are supported through social context. People around children such as parents and teachers. Learning about how to do and think something are both helped by interacting with an adult and in this case is teachers and parents. in teaching languages to young learners it is also advisable for teachers to learn about childrens' level of understanding. Childrens are curious and they love to find out new things but they also tend to imitate others. in this regard in teaching childrens new language we should check whether they understand the languages or just mouthing what teachers say to them.

Students' expectation sometimes do not match with the teachers' way of teaching. **Ricard (1993); Meadows (1993); Anderson and Lynch (1988)** stated that childrens want to please their teachers. The worst part is that they may continue following teachers activities even if they do not understand. They may carry on to do classroom activities without understanding of what they are doing. As stated above it is often to see that pupils in the classroom imitating the sentences in the text book as the teachers say and they seem to learn the activity but in reality they learn and understand nothing.

Meanwhile in the context of the curriculum of English language, Cameron (2003, p.105) argues that English program and the curricula in the school need to be aligned to promote a smooth transition for students and help teachers to meet what former young learners need. Moreover, when establishing english program and curricula there are some pitfalls that should be avoided. **Curtain and Pesola (2000)** explain some common mistakes in foreign language program that need to be addressed in developing effective English language teaching program such as making class meetings tom infrequently or having sessions that are too short; treating language differently from other lessons; providing insufficient training development for English teachers and having inadequate and inequitable teaching aids and resources, especially the technology based tools and resources.

To combat this problem **Gilzow (2002)** suggest that the effective young learners program should use technology appropriately and it also should be provided professional development. Nikolov and Curtain (2000) stated the following characteristic of effective young learners language program such as programs which focuses on meaning; integrating language instruction with mainstream curriculum; Use task-based and content-based approucehs; set realistic learning expectations and assessment and encourages learner autonomy.

In the context of Indonesian basic education, some researchers reported the imbalance between the results and the process of learning English. The value and outcome of competence were supposed to be far from satisfying, especially with the abolition of English lessons in elementary schools. The English lesson in Indonesia will merely become extracurricular activity thus students can choose whether they want to learn English or not.

### 3. Methodology

The design used in this research is survey technique in which the research subject was taken from early childhood education institution spreading in Ponorogo district which was under coordiantion of The Indonesian Kindergarten Teacher Association (IGTKI) and The Indonesian Early Childhood Education Association (*HIMPAUDI*) as primary data source. The data was obtained through the questionnaires distributed to the respondents as many as 31 teachers. The questionnaire covers 7 questions dealing with their understanding of the benefits of learning English from an early age, their desire to be able to teach English to children early on properly, and their willingness to teach English to children from an early age seriously. The result of the study was analyzed using a quantitaive descriptive approach. The analysis phase includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction is done by selecting data that is relevant to the grid of questions, making summaries, and organizing data in such a way in the forms of percentage. In presenting data, data that has been collected is arranged in accordance with the formulation of the problem so that it is easy to increase conclusions. The form of presentation is in the form of narrative texts and charts to make it easier for readers to see what has happened. Whereas the conclusion is made by making explanations.

### 4. Result and Discussion

The finding focuses on the two main problems raised in this study: 1) Do the early childhood education teachers have English education background?, and 2) to what extend do the early childhood education teachers ready to teach English for their students?

#### 4.1 The ECE teacher' Education Background

For the firs question of the teachers' education background was summarized as in the figure 1.

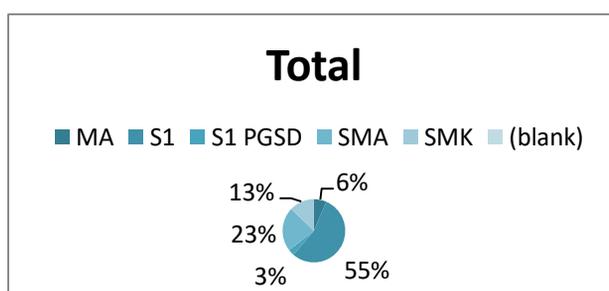


Figure 1: Education Qualification of the Respondens

Based on the figure 1, it is clearly that the early childhood education background of education was various. As many as 58% respondeds were s1 degree holder and 42% teachers were Senior High school graduates. The data showed that the mojority of their education qualification did not match with what they wanted to teach including English subject. The data could not be the basis assumption that they do not know and like to the English because of their experience of studying previously. Their beliefs about English could not be negative judged. As stated by Qbeita (2011) who studied the ECE teachers' belief in Jordan has concluded that there are not statistically significant differences in the kindergarten teachers' beliefs about teaching English due to academic level (Diploma, Bachelor) could be interpreted that teachers' beliefs are not determined by the educational level, but they are convictions determined by the general trend toward English language teaching. Therefore, there are still a possibility to introduce English in early childhood education as long as they have a possitive view on English.

#### 4.2 The ECE Teaches' Expectation

The data of second problem was discussed in Table 1. The respondens were asked to give their personal opinion related to their knowledge of English and their willingness to follow up the requirement for a better English practioner in their schools. The result of the responses were quantified in the forms of percentage.

**Table 1:** The percentage of Responses

No	Questions	Responses		
		SA*	A	DA
1	Do you know the benefits of learning English from an early age?	9,6%	74,1%	16,1%
2	Do you have the desire to be able to teach English to children early on properly?	58%	35,4%	6,4%
3	Are you interested in English-language books for children?	19,3%	74,1%	6,4%
4	Will you voluntarily provide time and funds to develop the science of teaching English to children from an early age?	12,9%	83,8%	3,2%
5	Would you be happy if you take part in training activities on how to teach English to children from an early age?	12,9%	77,4%	9,6%
6	Will you be happy with English?	58%	41,9%	
7	Do you know of an effective method of teaching English to children from an early age?		32,2%	67,7%

\*SA=Strongly Approve A=Approve DA=Disapprove

### 5. Conclusion

Based on the answer to the major research question about how to preserve the uniqueness of early childhood education teachers in introduction English for their students, then the conclusions can be drawn as follows.

Firstly, regardless of the different education background early childhood education teachers might have equal ability to be “good” educator due to their experience of studying English at their former school. The basic English vocabulary needed to introduce English for preschool students must be well kept in their memory. They just need to refresh their mind for recalling the English inputs that ever been learnt for some time ago.

Secondly, eventhough English is not compulсарy subject in early childhood education curriculum the teachers have own initiatives to introduce it due to their understanding of the globalization demands. They are fairly aware of their children future needs. Therefore, they are very open for any recommendation from outsider to build a good motivation and support the children learning English in order to gain the better future. Finally their “uniqueness” can be maintained by seting-up their attitudes and concerns that might be useful to help them as “good” English practioners.

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