

AN OVERVIEW OF TEACHING ENGLISH AT YOUNG LEARNERS

Muhammad Farhan Rafi¹

A. Background

Language, basically, is a communication mean to express feeling and thought. English is one of a foreign language in Indonesia. English has important roles to obtain and develop knowledge, technology and culture as well as to keep the good relationship among countries in this world. Realizing how important English is for the progress of our country, students should keep on developing English skills.

Indonesian students learn English as a compulsory subject starting from junior high school up to most higher education institution and universities. Moreover, nowadays English is a local content for the elementary school students. It means the students should have learnt English for at least six years both at secondary school and senior high school. Principally, the students should have understood and mastered English well. But in fact, it was discovered that high school graduation do not master English even English department students who are preparing themselves to be English teachers have the same problem. They have just minimum ability in English.

To overcome the issue above, there is a bright idea. It is introducing English earlier at elementary school. Learning at young age will be more quickly and effectively than at adult because the child brain is particularly adaptable to language acquisition up to puberty. Brown stated that the plasticity of the brain prior to puberty enables children to acquire not only their first language but also a second language.² A second language for the children who have benefit from a program of foreign language at primary school will be better prepared to respond the teaching in secondary school as a natural continuation.

The implementation of teaching English to young learners at elementary school should be carefully prepared so it does not effect the children negatively, the teaching must not be bored or frightened but students should be interested and enjoying English. Teaching English to young learners are different from teaching English to adult learners. The young learners are generally not aware that they are acquiring a language. Therefore,

¹Sekolah Tinggi Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia (STKIP PGRI) Jombang.

²H. Douglas Brown, *Principle of Language Learning and Teaching* (San Fransisco: San Fransisco Stated University, 1987), 43.

they do not pay attention much on language and system. Harmer also stated that children often learn indirectly than directly.³ The main objective of teaching English to young learners is not enable them to communicate in English but it should be matched with their cognitive and language development. Meanwhile, adult learners do approach a second language systematically and attempt to formulate linguistic information is available to them.⁴

Young learners are unique because they have some characteristics that differ from the adult learners. Therefore, teacher should consider the unique characteristics of young learners when they teach them. Children learn English depends on their developmental stage. Some children develop early, some later. Some children develop gradually, others in leaps and bounds. According to Philips younger learners responds to language according to what it does or what they can do with it, rather than treating it as an abstract system.⁵ To learn English, children learn differently from adult, according to Harmer children learn with many ways, they are (1) children respond to meaning even if they do not understand individual words, (2) children often learn indirectly rather than directly, (3) children's understanding comes not just from explanation, but also from what they see, hear and crucially, have a chance to touch and interact with, (4) children find abstract concept such as grammar rules difficult to grasp, (5) children generally display an enthusiasm for learning and curiosity about the world around them, (6) children have a need for individual attention and approval from the teacher, (7) children are keen to talk about themselves and respond well to learning that uses themselves and their own lives as main topics in the classroom, (8) children have limited attention span, unless activities are extremely engaging, they can get easily bored, losing interest after ten minutes or so.⁶

Children are also still learning about their environment. Younger children may ask question all time and may talk about what they are doing. The teacher him or herself should be aware of the learners' characteristics and take them into account in his or her teaching. The teacher is the only one who can see how far up the ladder his or her individual pupils are.

According to Kasbolah, some characteristics of young learners are as follows they learn by doing, they can talk about what they have done or heard, they can argue for

³Jeremy Harmer, *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (England: Ashford Colour Press Ltd, 2007), 82.

⁴H. Douglas Brown, *Principle of Language Learning and Teaching*, 53.

⁵Kasihani Kasbolah, *Teaching English to Young Learners* (Malang: Universitas Negeri Malang, 1999), 4.

something, they understand situation more quickly, they have a very short attention and concentration span, they are often happy and playing and working alone, they are able to work with adult, they learn English by using it and children learn best when they are motivated by being involved in activities which are relevant to them.⁷

Based on the characteristics belong to the children, a teacher should be able to choose the appropriate techniques of teaching to understand the way young learners learn. Teacher is the key of students' success in mastering the language, especially as elementary school teacher. They have a great opportunity to facilitate the students' best learning if they understand their characteristics.

The problem faced is how to teach English effectively and interestingly for the students of beginners. The fact, the younger they learn, the better they achieve. Stated in curriculum that the goal of teaching English in elementary school is to motivate and to encourage them in learning English, so that they are ready and have self-confidence to learn English in higher level. This approach covers several points that have to be considered in teaching and learning process. *First*, this approach considers that student learning motivation is the main factor that determines the students' success. *Second*, the meaningfulness of the materials has an important role in the success of the students. *Third*, materials and the learning activities will be more meaningful for the students if they are correlated to the students' need, experiences, interests, values and their future life. *Fourth*, in teaching and learning process, students are the main subject, not as object. Thus their need and their characteristic must be considered an all decision related to teaching and learning process.

Therefore, the English teachers who are involved in the teaching of English directly should know the native of the English teaching for the young learners. Consequently, it is a must for the English teachers to know the objectives of the teaching English at the elementary school the theoretical of teaching English as a foreign and second language. Teachers, who consider the requirement above, hopefully can lead the teaching learning of English successfully.

Based on the descriptive phenomena above, this research focuses on the implementation of teaching English at MI Nurul Iman Dempok Diwek Jombang, concerning instructional material, instructional media and teaching learning process.

⁶Jeremy Harmer, *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, 82.

⁷Kasihani Kasbolah, *Teaching English to Young Learners*, 4.

B. Method

This research presents the information concerning the current status of phenomenon and it is directed toward determine of a situation as it exist at the time of the study. Arikunto stated that to conduct the research it is natural and emphasizes on natural description.⁸ So the researcher uses qualitative design, which describes the phenomenon happens, in doing the research. Principally the researcher wants to explain the teaching English at MI Nurul Iman Depok especially about the material, media, the method and the technique. To find the data the researcher uses the instruments, questionnaire, observation, interview and documentation. The research is focused at MI Nurul Iman Depok and the subjects of the study are the English teacher and the students of fifth grade.

C. Discussion

The researcher collected the data by using questionnaire, observation, interview and documentation. After questionnaire and observation were administered, the documentation was used to take the researcher the instructional material and the list of the students' achievement score in English for semester 1. Based on the analysis, the researcher discusses the result of the research below.

1. The Instructional Materials

The teacher chooses the text book used because the teacher considers that it will help much to reach the aim of teaching learning English at MI Nurul Iman Depok. The target of this book is to introduce and also try to improve the ability of the elementary school's students, so they can communicate with English actively. The book provides four English skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing.

As the children are very enthusiastic and energetic learners, the activities in the book should be mainly developed on various kinds of activities to avoid boredom. The content of the book has a variety of topics, according to the learners, level and needs, since they are beginners of English learners, they are introduced to various topics relating to their environment. Such as Hobbies, Telling the time, Food and Drink, Daily Activities, Clothes and Costumes (semester I) Shapes, Transportation, Health and Hospital, Occupations, Weather and Season (semester II). Each topic on the book provides kind of various

⁸Suharsini Arikunto, *Prosedur Penelitian Suatu Pendekatan Praktek* (Jakarta: PT. Rineka Cipta, 2006), 12.

activities and English skills that are simple and easy to do and understand for students such as; vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The book introduced sufficient vocabularies for each unit. Moreover, the various kinds of activities enable the students to increase their vocabulary more than they require. Furthermore, the vocabularies are provided in the context, so that the students are able to practice how to use the words in sentences.

The book is indeed very good. The activities in the book develop the students' learning the four skills integrated. The material covers a variety of topics. The materials presented in an interesting way to attract the children. Various kinds of activities are interesting and suitable with the children characteristics. The instructions are given in the simple English and Indonesian. Using the book, English is fun rather than a heavy subject. Because of the various kinds of activities, the teacher is able to choose any activities he likes based on the activities in the book.

There are sufficient exercises in the book. But it still should be developed further. The instruction for activities and exercises and tasks are clear. For instance, read the text, arrange these sentences into a group of paragraph, complete these sentences with the correct words, etc.

As a component of the curriculum, instructional materials function to achieve the instructional objectives which have been formulated. Actually, the English teacher is free to choose the source of instructional materials as long as it is line with the theme in the Basic course Outline and the students' capacity. Cunningsworth stated that a course book or textbook is a reference for learners on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.⁹

The book used in MI Nurul Iman Dempok is good, but it still could be improved. Another alternative of improving the book is by presenting pictures in color. By presenting the picture, it will give great contribution to the students in understanding the meaning of words and sentences. And by presenting the picture in color, it is possible that the students are more interested and attracted. As the result, better understanding can be expected.

Nevertheless, the teacher should not depend only on the certain materials. The teacher may choose the instructional materials from any sources such as newspaper, magazine, radio, television, etc.

⁹Cunningsworth A, *Evaluating and Selecting EFL Teaching Materials* (London: Heineman Educational Books, 1995), 7.

2. Instructional Media

The use of media in teaching learning process at MI Nurul Iman Dempok is sufficient based on the need of elementary school students. The real objects around the students in and out of the classroom are their first media and parts of them are written in English. For example, on the door of the classroom, the teacher puts the big writing *Class Room*. Several pictures hanging on the wall in and out of the class used as the media in teaching vocabulary, especially about concrete noun.

When the researcher came to the class to make an observation to find media that the teacher used, it was found two media when the teacher taught students about *Shapes*, they were concrete nouns and pictures. For concrete noun or real object, the teacher brought a ball, an egg, a cube, a triangle and a cone. By using these real objects, the teacher asked the students to mention what the thing and the shape are for each real object. For example, the teacher showed a ball while saying, “what is this?”. The students answered, “that is a ball?”. Then the teacher asked again with other question, “what is the shape?”. The students answered, “it is spherical”. After wards the teacher showed other real object and did like the ball activity and kept going for all real objects. These activities were repeated many times to make the students master the topic that they learned. For pictures, the teacher brought many kinds of shapes pictures such as, picture of a square, picture of an oval, picture of a rectangle, picture of sphere, picture of a pyramid, picture of a cylinder, picture of a cube. To apply the teaching learning process for shapes topic using pictures, the teacher asked the students to say shapes based on the picture that shown by the teacher. For example, the teacher said the shape of the picture then the students repeated it or sometimes the teacher showed the picture of a square and the students immediately mentioned the shapes of square, “that is square.”. These activities were applied many times in order to the students understood the topic.

Besides the activities above, to avoid the students’ boredom in studying English, the teacher gives them occasion to study out of the classroom. For example, the students are brought to some places near the school, where the students can find many kinds of real objects around them as the new vocabularies. For example, the teacher tells them what thing they can see, what people’s activities around the place and after that the teacher hopes the students to tell with their own words about what they have seen.

The observation of using the teaching media shows those some kinds of media are important instruments to be used and interesting for students because the elementary school students like playing while studying.

3. The Teaching Method and Technique

By making an interview and making an observation to the English teacher and his class, the researcher finds the data about the method and technique used in teaching English. They are described as follows:

a. The Teaching Method

In using the method and technique, the teacher of the fifth grade at MI Nurul Iman Dempok often asks the students to respond his command physically. This is in line with Total Physical Response Method, which often utilizes imperative as well as interrogative moods, the total physical response is effective in the beginning levels of language skill. Through the physical response, students will feel comfortable. At this time the teacher can move the activities into the more communicative situation in which the students can respond the teacher's stimulus verbally, ask question and other oral work.

The English teacher in teaching English often uses the total physical response method. The total physical response method provides an enjoyable learning experience and has a minimum of the stress that typically accompanies learning a foreign language. A total physical response lesson might involves the teacher to give command to students to do something. For example when the teacher teaches *part of body*, he asks the students to show their head, fingers, hands and so on. And also when they explain the students about the using of *command*, the teacher asks them "stand up and put your book on my table!" and immediately the students stand up from their seat and walk toward the teacher's table and put the book on it.

Beside the total physical respond, the Direct Method is also used. The Direct Method tends to encourage the students to speak directly without paying attention to the structure much. In this method, the teacher has a great role in correcting the students' mistakes. So the students can improve their structure in accordance with the mistake that they have made. The simple idea behind the direct method is that the learners learn a foreign language by hearing it spoken and enjoying in conversation. Students are also taught to associate meaning in the target language directly. New target language words or phrases are introduced through the use of realia and pictures. Students speak in the target language a great deal and communicate as if in real situation. For example, the teacher said the shape

of the picture shown then the students repeated it or sometimes the teacher showed the picture of a square and the students immediately mentioned the shapes of square, “that is square.”

Other method is Grammar Translation Method. In this method, students learn by translating from one language to the other, they often translate reading passages in the target language. For example when the teacher teaches reading and the students do not understand the meaning of words, the teacher gives the synonym of it instead of translate the word or sentences into Indonesian. Only new vocabularies are translated into Indonesian. Sometimes the teacher can also move through what Krashen and Terrel define as three stages in language teaching learning process, (1) the reproduction skill develop, (2) early production, usually students make errors, but the teacher does not need to force correction, since the meaning of it is stressed, (3) extending production into longer stretches of discourse involving role-play, dialogue and games.¹⁰

b. The Teaching Technique

The techniques used by the teacher of the fifth grade of MI Nurul Iman Dempok are he asks the students to listen them first, no students voice are allowed, then ask the students to repeat later on and finally enable the students to engage in song, dialogue or any other activities.

The other techniques that are used in teaching learning English, it is song. The song is very interesting and helps students to increase their vocabularies, the students enjoy it very much. Usually, when the students get bored with the technique given the teacher invites them to sing together. So by the song given the teacher wants to overcome the students' boredom and make the students relax.

Technique is any of a wide variety of exercise activities or tasks used classroom for realizing lesson objectives. Teaching technique can help the teacher in making language learning become pleasurable activity to which children and teacher learn and teach with eagerness and enthusiasm. The technique used in teaching English are combined among of the methods is the dialogue. The dialogue is done between the students and the teacher and between the students and the students. It happens during teaching learning process in the class. For example, after explaining the lesson, the teacher always ask the students saying “any question so far?”, at that time the students rise the hand and mention the asked question, then the teacher answer what the student asks. This method really helps the

¹⁰H. Douglas Brown, *Principle of Language Learning and Teaching*, 184.

teacher in understanding the students' problem and ability in teaching learning process. By the dialogue, the students can express their difficulty and any other problems related with the lesson given and in the other hand, the teacher can make personal approach toward the students.

4. The Implementation of Teaching Learning English

In this term, the researcher describes about pre activities, whilst activities, classroom atmosphere, students' attitude toward the teaching English and post activities.

a. Pre-activities

The data from observation shows that the English teacher in he fifth grade of MI Nurul Iman Dempok can open the lesson well. He always greets the students before starting the discussion. Since MI Nurul Iman Dempok is an Islamic school, there are two greeting used. The main greeting is "Assalamu'alaikum" then by the English greeting, such as "good morning students!", "How are you?" after greeting then he reads the attendance list to know whether the students are present or not, he reviews the previous lesson and tells the students about the topic to be discussed.

b. Whilst-activities

The data from observation shows that the main technique that is frequently used by the teacher is giving explanation if there are new materials. Sometimes the teacher asks the students to sing a song when the students get bored with the technique given. The teacher sometimes gives some quizzes and games because the children like them very much. For reading, the most frequent technique is reading aloud. He asks the smart students to read in a loud voice to be the model for the others. Then the other students have their turn. He also gives the script of conversation and the students read it and practice it. The common activities are individual, whole class activities or sometimes pair work and group work.

c. Classroom Atmosphere

When the researcher came to make an observation, it was found that there are forty-four students in the class. The classroom's size is large enough and it is comfortable for students to study. This class is not only used to study English but also used to study other lessons. There is a male teacher teaching students in the classroom. He is still young and could manage the class well. He has firm attitude and loud voice, so the students could join the teaching learning process enjoyable.

The use of English was nearly fifty percent if it is was compared with the use of Indonesian. It proved that the teacher had language discipline in the classroom. It also

happened with the students. When they wanted to ask something to the teacher, they tried to use their English although it was sometimes combined with Indonesian.

The teacher approached the students individually. For example, when the students did lid of class work, the teacher walked around the class to know whether the students had any difficulty in understanding the instruction of the question or not. After doing the class work, the students were asked to answer the question in turn while the teacher corrected the mistake if any.

The teacher at the fifth grade of MI Nurul Iman Depok often punished the students who broke the rule. For example, when the students came late or did not do any assignment, the teacher ordered them to stand up in front of the class or leave the class. Sometimes the teacher asked the students who was noisy to memorize some new vocabularies.

d. Student's Attitude Toward the Teaching English

To know students' attitude toward the teaching English, the researcher used the questionnaire for the students. The table shown below shows the students' attitude toward the teaching English.

Table 1. Percentages of Students Having Described Attitude

No	Item	%	
		Yes	No
1	The students like English	93	7
2	English is difficult	32	68
3	The teacher's explanation is clear and understood	86	14
4	The activities are interesting	70	30
5	The students are bored with the lesson	14	86
6	The students do the homework	91	9
7	The students are afraid of English	5	95
8	The students want to speak English	100	0
9	The students take a private course	43	57
10	The students like English beginning from elementary school	95	5
11	The students feel necessary to learn English at home	100	0
12	The students learn how to speak English at home	23	77
13	The students learn English by themselves at home	27	73
14	The students like watching the English film	68	32
15	The students are interested in listening the English song	75	25

From the table above the researcher describes the result of the students' attitude toward the teaching English they are, (1) most of the students like English, 93%, (2) some of them think that English is difficult, 32%, (3) most of the students agree that the teacher's explanation is clear and understood, 86%, (4) they also agree that the activities in the teaching learning process are interesting, 70%, (5) a lot of students do their homework, 91%, (6) some of the students feel bored with the lesson, 14%, (7) a few students are afraid of English, 5%, (8) they want to be able to speak English, 100%, (9) they take a course, 43%, (10) the students like English beginning from elementary school, 95%, (11) all students feel a need to learn English in the elementary school, 100%, (12) some of the students learn how to pronoun English word at home, 23%, (13) only 27% of the students learn English by themselves at home, (14) the students like western movie, 68%, (15) most of the students are interested in listening English song, 75%.

e. Post-activities

The English teacher always concludes the instructional materials that had been presented before he left the classroom. He also tells the students about the topic to be discussed for the next meeting. The teacher can manage the time allotment available for each meeting. He has enough time to conclude the materials presented before he left the classroom. When the bell rings, he stops teaching with concluding the material.

5. Students' Achievement

From the result of the observation made by researcher, it is found that the students have very positive attitude toward the teaching of English. It is known from the students' achievement that the score of the students' achievement is good because the score the average is 82.

Table 2. The Students Achievement

CLASS V		
No	Score	Student
1	60 – 69	6
2	70 – 79	22
3	80 – 89	9
4	90 – 100	7

Data from the document above the achievement of the students' grade at the first semester in academic year 2014-2015 shows that the students got grade 90-100 (7%), the

students got grade 80-89 (23%), the students got grade 70-79 (57%), the students got grade 60-69 (14%) and no student who got grade below 59.

Observing the students' attitude toward the teaching of English and there is achievement in the finding the write concludes that the attitude toward the teaching English can determine the students' motivation on learning English. It can be expected that the students who has favorable attitudes toward learning English will also be willing to study the language actively, and the students' achievement will be better. Here the researcher can conclude that the attitude plays a very important role in learning language. If the students do not have a good attitude toward English, it is impossible for them to be actively involved in the study and the students' achievement will be lower.

D. Conclusions

The English teacher was able to arrange and choose the appropriate materials for his students. It was good from the point of the content and various kinds of activities. The instructional media has some kinds media used by the teacher such as real things and pictures. The method and technique that the teacher made had the variation to overcome the boredom in teaching learning process. The teacher applied direct method, total physical respond method and grammar translation method. The teacher combined among of methods with dialogue, songs and games. Finally, the students could reach better achievement, the average of the students' score is 85.*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arikunto, Suharsini. *Prosedur Penelitian Suatu Pendekatan Praktek*. Jakarta: PT. Rineka Cipta, 2006.
- Brown, H. Douglas. *Principle of Language Learning and Teaching*. San Fransisco: San Fransisco Stated University, 1987.
- Cunningsworth A. *Evaluating and Selecting EFL Teaching Materials*. London: Heineman Educational Books, 1995.
- Kasbolah, Kasihani. *Teaching English to Young Learners*. Malang: Universitas Negeri Malang, 1999.