

Enhancing English Learning Motivation in Early Childhood Through Singing Activities in Handio Village

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Abstract

English language learning for early childhood in Handio Village has increasingly been introduced since the preschool (PAUD) level. This demand has led parents to enroll their children in schools where English is used as a medium of instruction. As a foreign language in Indonesia, English is gradually being introduced at the early childhood education (PAUD) level. Children aged 0–6 years are in their golden age, a critical period in human development that significantly influences their future growth. Therefore, all aspects of language should be introduced before this phase ends. English is now being introduced at the kindergarten level. To effectively teach English, appropriate learning methods must be employed to spark students' interest and motivation in using English in fun, engaging learning activities—both in spoken and written forms—in ways that are fluent and socially contextual. This research aims to explore the implementation of English learning at the early childhood education (PAUD) level in Handio Village. Data collection was carried out through interviews to obtain direct verbal information. Among the preschools in Handio Village, one kindergarten (TK) was selected as the research site. From the data obtained, this TK has already integrated English learning into its teaching and learning process.

Keywords: Learning, English, Early Childhood

Meningkatkan Motivasi Belajar Bahasa Inggris pada Anak Usia Dini Melalui Kegiatan Bernyanyi di Desa Handio

Abstrak

Pembelajaran bahasa Inggris untuk anak usia dini di Desa Handio semakin diperkenalkan sejak jenjang Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini (PAUD). Tuntutan ini mendorong para orang tua untuk menyekolahkan anak-anak mereka di lembaga pendidikan yang menggunakan bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa pengantar. Sebagai bahasa asing di Indonesia, bahasa Inggris secara bertahap mulai diperkenalkan pada jenjang PAUD. Anak-anak usia 0–6 tahun berada pada masa keemasan, yaitu periode kritis dalam perkembangan manusia yang sangat memengaruhi pertumbuhan mereka di masa depan. Oleh karena itu, seluruh aspek bahasa sebaiknya sudah diperkenalkan sebelum fase ini berakhir. Saat ini, bahasa Inggris telah mulai diajarkan di tingkat taman kanak-kanak. Untuk mengajarkan bahasa Inggris secara efektif, diperlukan metode pembelajaran yang sesuai guna membangkitkan minat dan motivasi siswa dalam menggunakan bahasa Inggris melalui kegiatan pembelajaran yang menyenangkan dan menarik—baik secara lisan maupun tertulis—dengan cara yang lancar dan kontekstual secara sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi implementasi pembelajaran bahasa Inggris pada jenjang PAUD di Desa Handio. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara untuk memperoleh informasi langsung secara verbal. Dari beberapa lembaga PAUD di Desa Handio, satu taman kanak-kanak (TK) dipilih sebagai lokasi penelitian. Berdasarkan data yang diperoleh, TK tersebut telah mengintegrasikan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris dalam proses belajar mengajarnya.

Kata kunci: Pembelajaran, Bahasa Inggris, Anak Usia Dini

INTRODUCTION

Today, it has become common for people to be able to use English. As an international language, English plays a crucial role in everyday life for people around the world. It is widely used in education, employment, entertainment, electronic communication, and travel, making English an essential language to master. This means that people from diverse regional, religious, and cultural backgrounds have a shared medium for communication—English.

Therefore, it is important for us to be able to use English proficiently, both in spoken and written forms. Language serves as a vital tool for communication, and English is increasingly being used as a means of communication from an early age. This growing demand has encouraged parents to enroll their children in schools where English is the primary language of instruction. In recent years, English as a foreign language has begun to penetrate early childhood education levels in Indonesia (Sulistyo, 2009).

According to Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Chapter I, Article 1, Clause 14, Early Childhood Education (PAUD) refers to efforts directed at children from birth to the age of six through educational stimulation to support their physical and spiritual development so they are ready to enter formal education.

Article 28, which discusses Early Childhood Education, states:

- (1) PAUD is organized before the basic education level,
- (2) PAUD can be provided through formal, non-formal, and/or informal education channels,
- (3) PAUD in formal education includes TK (Kindergarten), RA, or equivalent forms,
- (4) PAUD in non-formal education includes playgroups (KB), daycare centers (TPA), or equivalent forms,
- (5) PAUD in informal education includes family education or education organized by the community.

According to data from the Ministry of National Education (Depdiknas) in 2002, only 28% of the 26.1 million children aged 0–6 years in Indonesia had access to early childhood education.

Early childhood refers to children aged 0 to 6 years. Experts consider this period a "golden age"—a critical phase in human development that will determine future growth. Therefore, all aspects of language use should be introduced before this golden period ends. At this age, it is essential to introduce proper and correct language usage, as this will be highly beneficial for communication within their environment.

Children's language development actually begins at birth through the most basic forms of pre-verbal communication, such as crying. This is followed by babbling, simple words or sentences, often accompanied by body movements or gestures as complementary communication. In educational psychology, there are several learning theories that serve as the foundation for teaching.

Kindergarten is one of the institutions responsible for supporting the growth and development of early childhood. To fulfill this purpose, kindergartens play a key role in developing the various potentials of children, including cognitive, language, physical

(gross and fine motor), and socio-emotional skills. Early Childhood Education (PAUD) serves as a preschool institution that introduces children to school structures and culture.

The introduction of English to pre-kindergarten or kindergarten-aged children is a welcome development. However, concerns have also emerged due to the lack of appropriate methods and materials tailored for early childhood learners. Moreover, the implementation of English instruction is heavily influenced by the role of teachers and the policies of each educational institution, which ultimately determine how English as a foreign language is delivered at the pre-K or kindergarten level.

Kindergarten is a formal early childhood education institution designed for children aged four to six years. It serves as one of the key institutions responsible for supporting the overall development of young children. Its main function is to nurture the various potentials of children at this early stage, including cognitive, language, physical (both gross and fine motor), and socio-emotional development.

The most sensitive period for language development in a person's life is between the ages of two and seven. All aspects of language acquisition should be introduced before this sensitive period ends. At this stage, it is crucial to teach children how to use language properly and correctly, as these skills are essential for effective communication with their surroundings.

Language is a system of symbols used to communicate with others. In humans, language is marked by the ability to create meaningful sentences using a finite set of words and rules—making it a highly creative human endeavor.

According to Santrock (2004), language consists of basic sounds, or phonemes. In English, there are 36 phonemes. Phonology is the study of a language's sound system. Phonological rules determine acceptable sequences of sounds (such as "sp," "ba," or "ar") and those that are not typically used (such as "zx" or "qp"). A common phoneme in English is /k/, as represented by the "k" in ski and the "c" in cat. While these sounds may vary slightly, they are not treated as separate phonemes in English, unlike in languages such as Arabic where such distinctions may result in entirely different phonemes.

Morphology refers to the rules governing the combination of morphemes, which are the smallest units of sound that carry meaning. Every English word consists of one or more morphemes. For example, help is a single morpheme, while helper consists of two morphemes: help + -er, with -er meaning "a person who helps."

Syntax involves the rules by which words are combined to form acceptable phrases and sentences. A closely related concept is grammar, which is a formal description of the syntactic rules.

Semantics refers to the meanings of words and sentences. Each word has a set of semantic features. For instance, girl and woman share features with female and human, but differ in age-related aspects.

Pragmatics involves the ability to engage in conversation appropriately according to intent and context. Pragmatic rules ensure that certain sentences are spoken in appropriate contexts. Through pragmatics, we learn to express intended meanings using words,

expressions, and sentences. Pragmatic skills help us communicate more effectively with others.

Two influential theories in child psychology that are often used to understand language development are those of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. These theories provide valuable insights into how children learn language—especially a foreign language.

According to Piaget, children are active learners and thinkers. They constantly interact with their social environment and solve the problems they encounter, which leads to active learning. This process is self-constructed and not merely a result of imitation. Piaget emphasized that children naturally seek to understand their surroundings through questioning, and from an early age, they have specific intentions behind their questions and actions.

Piaget (as cited in Mukhlisah, 2015) divided children's understanding of the world into four major cognitive developmental stages, each becoming more sophisticated with age:

- 1) Sensorimotor
- 2) Preoperational
- 3) Concrete operational
- 4) Formal operational

It is believed that all children pass through these stages in the same order, though the pace may vary from child to child, and no stage can be skipped.

The following is a summary of Piaget's stages of cognitive development.

Children in kindergarten typically fall within the preoperational stage, which ranges from 2 to 7 years old. At this stage, children begin to represent the world using words, images, and symbols. According to Piaget, although preschool children can symbolically represent their environment, they are not yet capable of performing operations, which are internalized mental actions that were previously carried out physically.

According to Vygotsky (in Fakhruddin, 2015), his theory differs from Piaget's theory regarding language and early childhood. Vygotsky argued that language plays a crucial role in the development of young children. Through language, Vygotsky believed that a child absorbs new understandings or even new values that are considered beneficial, at least for themselves.

Children are inherently social beings. The center of their development and learning occurs within a social context. This social context exists when children are surrounded by others from birth. The people in their environment play a significant role in helping them learn—through play and games, storytelling, conversation, showing objects, and sharing ideas. In this setting, adults act as mediators between the child and the world.

With the support of adults in their social environment, or assistance from teachers at school, children are capable of doing and understanding much more than they could on their own. This means that learning how to do things and how to think both require interaction with adults within their social surroundings.

Many of Vygotsky's theories have been used to develop frameworks for teaching foreign languages to early childhood learners.

METHOD

In this study, data collection was conducted using interview techniques. The interviews aimed to obtain direct verbal information from the research subjects. They were used to explore personal experiences and individual attitudes. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the subjects. In addition to interviews, the researcher also gathered supplementary data by documenting English learning media used in several schools. The data analysis technique employed in this research was descriptive-qualitative analysis, which attempts to provide a detailed description or explanation of the research subjects and objects. This method analyzes qualitative cases and further interprets them until a general conclusion is formed. The steps taken in conducting this research were as follows: 1) The researcher prepared a work plan, outlining all research activities from creating data collection tools to compiling results, conclusions, and the final research report. The research was carried out over a period of six months. 2) The researcher designed instruments to collect data, in the form of questions related to English language learning for early childhood, which were addressed to the subjects (kindergarten teachers) during the teaching and learning process. 3) The researcher selected a kindergarten in Handio Village as the research site. This kindergarten was chosen based on its implementation of English language instruction in the classroom. 4) Data collection was conducted through interviews with the research subjects, namely kindergarten teachers in Sukolilo District, Surabaya City. The interviews consisted of questions regarding English teaching methods used by the teachers during classroom activities. In addition to interviews, the researcher also gathered supporting data using documentation methods. 5) The researcher processed the collected data, primarily consisting of interview results from kindergarten teachers in Sukolilo District, Surabaya City, focusing on how English was taught by the subjects. 6) The final step was analyzing the processed data. The analysis was based on the interview results with kindergarten teachers in Sukolilo District, Surabaya City, regarding the English teaching methods they applied during the learning process.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study is a scientific endeavor aimed at obtaining insights into Early Childhood Education (PAUD), particularly at the kindergarten level, related to English language learning conducted by kindergarten teachers in the Sukolilo District, Surabaya City. Of the 57 kindergartens in Sukolilo District, 28 were selected as research subjects. Based on the data collected, all 28 kindergartens have incorporated English language instruction into their teaching and learning processes.

From the interview results, it was found that almost all kindergartens use a variety of English teaching methods. The most commonly used method among teachers is songs and movement, with 36% of the respondents indicating that they use this method for teaching English. In addition to songs and movement, the teachers also apply other methods such as games, storytelling, role-playing, and arts and crafts as part of their English teaching strategy.

Language is considered a crucial tool for helping children understand the activities of people around them and to guide how they should act within their environment. Vygotsky emphasized that language enables children to absorb concepts such as paying attention, memorizing, categorizing, planning, problem-solving, and developing their personal worldview (Fakhruddin, 2015).

Children's language development begins from birth through the simplest forms of pre-linguistic communication, such as crying, and gradually evolves into cooing, babbling, and the use of simple words and gestures. Through language, children are able to communicate with others about events and their surroundings (Piaget in Mukhlisah, 2015).

English plays an important role in the educational process both at school and at home. Teaching English requires appropriate methods to increase children's interest and motivation to engage in enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences. The goal of English language instruction is to enable students to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, within appropriate social contexts (Depdiknas, 2003). English proficiency includes the skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. In Early Childhood Education (PAUD), language is developed alongside behavioral aspects, such as social-emotional growth, independence, moral and religious values, as well as basic competencies like motor, cognitive, and language skills (Arikunto, 2007).

Children's use of language is shaped by their processing of acquired input and their environment. The linguistic community where a child lives plays a vital role in their language development. This process also influences personality development, shaped through interaction with others, which in turn affects their use of language (Susanto, 2011).

Recent theories on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) suggest that the earlier a child begins to learn a foreign language, the more quickly and effectively they acquire it. This is attributed to their stronger short- and long-term memory, reduced psychological pressure, and a higher level of interaction. While early English learning in preschool is encouraging, there are concerns regarding the appropriateness of methods and materials used. The implementation of English instruction in preschools greatly depends on the teachers' roles and each school's policy.

Other studies also highlight the benefits of early foreign language acquisition, including increased intellectual flexibility, academic and social language skills, and a better ability to adapt to multicultural environments. As adults, these children are likely to become high-quality, competitive human resources. Learning a foreign language from an early age also deepens a child's understanding of their own language and culture, as they gain greater access to diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. However, English language learning in Indonesia is distinct from second language learning in countries where English is used as a medium of communication. In such countries, children are naturally exposed to English in their environment, making acquisition easier than in Indonesia.

Essentially, children learn foreign languages best in communicative and meaningful contexts. These include social interactions, play, music, stories, arts, crafts, and sports.

One effective method identified in kindergartens in Handio Village is the use of songs. Songs are particularly suitable for preschoolers when they have the following characteristics: simple and easy-to-memorize lyrics, educational messages, age-appropriate themes, and melodies that are easy for children to grasp.

Furthermore, the purpose of English learning at this level should focus primarily on language exposure and familiarity, enabling children to understand how to use language properly, confidently express their ideas or opinions, and communicate effectively with their surroundings.

According to Ela (2012), movement and song play a vital role in a child's growth and development. Music contributes to a child's overall balance in life, enabling them to express their thoughts and emotions and regulate their emotional state. Singing, as a component of music, serves as a medium for conveying feelings and ideas, making it a highly enjoyable activity for children.

The singing method is expected to increase children's interest in learning English by creating a joyful and stress-free environment. When children enjoy the learning method being used, the learning process becomes more effective. This helps prevent boredom or fatigue, and supports vocabulary acquisition. Once children are engaged and motivated to learn through singing, they are more likely to follow each learning step with ease, thus enhancing their ability to memorize and master English vocabulary (Miranti et al., 2015).

A teacher's ability to design learning activities that involve interaction with objects and the surrounding environment is essential to strengthening children's foundational thinking, language, vision, and behavior. Such creative teaching strategies also help stimulate students' motivation to learn (Widyasari, 2016).

English should ideally be introduced to children as early as possible. Given that English is the first foreign language in Indonesia, its instruction must be conducted gradually. Careful selection of age-appropriate materials that support cognitive and linguistic development, along with a pleasant and engaging learning environment, are key to ensuring successful English instruction for young learners.

The success of early childhood English learning is influenced by several key factors:

- 1) Qualified teachers who are capable of creating dynamic and engaging learning experiences.
- 2) Adequate learning resources and facilities that support the learning process.
- 3) A simple yet attractive curriculum that is appropriate for young learners.

CONCLUSION

English language instruction is being provided by kindergarten teachers in Handio Village. Teaching English to young children is both an interesting and challenging topic. On one hand, it offers significant benefits, but on the other hand, concerns remain due to the lack of appropriate teaching methods and materials that can be effectively used in classrooms. Moreover, the successful implementation of English as a foreign language in kindergartens largely depends on the role of the teacher and the policies of each school. The choice of teaching methods for Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a critical role

in delivering English material effectively. Some recommended methods that can be used by teachers include storytelling, singing, role-playing, and other interactive techniques that are suitable for the cognitive and emotional development of young children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to all individuals and institutions whose invaluable support and contributions have made this work possible.

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