

TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS: INTRODUCTION TO PHONOLOGY IN DEVELOPING PRE READING SKILL

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ABSTRACT

Language development is one of the development aspects in early childhood education curriculum 2013. Currently, teaching English to young learners should be attention because of the needs. One of the language skills, particularly reading skill becomes interesting in early childhood education since Indonesian has low interest in reading. Thus, reading behaviour is needed for young learners. One of the learning methods in teaching reading for young learners is phonics method. The method consists of phonics awareness, letters awareness, the knowledge of blending, segmenting and removing syllables. This is supported by the environment such as teachers, peers and parents who assist the children to achieve the learning objectives perfectly. It aims to develop the pre reading skill, to enrich the vocabulary and to enhance the reading comprehension. In the learning activity, this method can be collaborated with other activities, for instance singing, dancing, storytelling, and drama.

Keywords: *phonics method, early childhood education, pre reading skill*

1 INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is the early foundation for the children to carry on the education into the higher level. According to curriculum 2013, the domain of language consists of to understand the receptive language (listening and reading skills), expressive language, means that to express the language through verbal and non-verbal way, and to recognize the literacy through play. It is supported by the learning activity conducted by the children, aims to assist them to develop domains optimally, for instance language domain (Suminah et al., 2005). Language is a system of symbol to categorize, to organize, and to clarify the thought (Otto, 2015: 3 in Puspitasari et al., 2016). Then, five-year-old child has capability to improve the language and approximately the range of vocabulary is 5000-8000 words (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2008: 75 in Puspitasari et al., 2016). In the learning

activity, reading section is one of the ways to improve and to evolve the language skill for children. Suggate, Schaughency, & Reese (2013) believe that reading activity could be started from four-year-old child (in Puspitasari et al., 2016). Besides, in ECE the development of language consists of the mother tongue, which is *Bahasa*, and foreign language, such as English.

Teaching a foreign language, such as English is needed because of the globalization era and the needs which motivate Indonesian to be accomplished individual to master English. Besides, English is used as the first language in International schools in Indonesia. It aims to improve the quality and to participate in any other occasion nationally and internationally (National Education Minister, n.d). Thus, teaching English in ECE becomes essential. Based on the experiences, some international primary schools require the children to be able to

read in English before they go into that school. However, the survey conducted by UNESCO showed that the reading interest of Indonesian society was 0,001% in 2012. It means that only one person of a thousand people who likes reading. This phenomenon is in line with Asianto Sinambela, as Head of Community Service Communication, stated that the reading interest of literacy in Indonesian society was low from other countries. The data showed that Indonesia was in 60th of 61 countries (NN, 2016; Jamhari, 2016).

The literacy development for children is needed since it is a foundation to assist children in learning and to be starting point for them to carry on the level of education (Wake & Benson, 2016). Furthermore, the pre reading activity and writing skill for the children are essential and it is a definite base for literacy ability and achievement at school (NHICD, 2000; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001 dalam Puspitasari et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2015: 1). Regarding to the literacy development at school, a teacher has an important role to help the government in introducing and evolving the reading interest for children, for instance to engage them into the reading activities. In ECE, teaching English to young learners could be started from introduction of phonics as a first step in developing reading skill. The learning activity in introducing phonics in the classroom could be done through several methods and strategies properly by considering the children's characteristics. Hence, the teacher is expected to choose and to provide the amusing activities for children as they acquire the foreign language through different and unique ways (Pinter, 2006). It means that the learning process of children is different from the adults.

The previous researches showed that the children would be easier to read since they understood the concept of phonics as the first step of reading (Wahyuni & Fauziati, n.d.; Farokhbakht & Nejadansari, 2015; Jamaludin et al., 2015). Moreover,

introduction of phonics could give benefits for children to learn English because English is a spoken language not a written language, means a word is read by pronouncing the letter sound not the latter name. For instance, *cat* is spelt through the letter sound becomes *k-e-t*. If the word *cat* is spelt by looking at the letter name, it could be *si-ei-ti*. It's problematic for the children in developing reading skill in English. Thus, the concept of sounds becomes essential for the children to understand the way how to pronounce the letter properly and fluently in developing reading skill.

Practically, teacher's role is influential in teaching and learning activity, particularly teaching English to young learners through phonics in developing pre reading skill. Teacher as a facilitator assists children to comprehend the concept of phonics (Othman & Kiely, 2016). On the other hand, there was a research showed that the teacher's capacity of literacy was declined (Barr et al., 2016). Moreover, the children's environment, for instance their peers, influences the children's readiness in learning activity. It supported by Stanton-chapman (2015) who believed that the learning activity which involves the children and the peer would establish positive interaction and relationship. Besides, the teacher uses various media in teaching and learning activity to facilitate and support children. The media could be numerous based on their characteristics, especially the usage of technology in this era in introducing of phonology to the children (Abrami et al., 2016).

According to the explanation above, the author would like to examine the method of phonics in teaching pre reading skill in English, to identify the roles of the environment which facilitate the children in accomplishing the learning objectives, to unpack the media used in teaching and learning activities, and to discover the benefits of phonics method in ECE aimed to develop the pre reading

skill in teaching English to young learners.

2 PHONOLOGY AWARENESS SKILL IN ECE

2.1 The Method of Phonics in Teaching English in ECE

Teaching English to young learners has numerous ways, for instance in developing of literacy which covers spoken skills in storytelling, translating the words, and introducing phonics, which consists of the ability of understanding the alphabetic fundamental, listening skill, and phonology (Ostayan, 2016). There are several approaches in teaching and learning activity conducted to achieve the learning objectives. An approach in teaching foreign language should emphasize the context, thus it could be used in daily activities (Ellison, 2015). Practically, student-centered used to facilitate the children to develop the learning independency during the learning process (Jones, 2007 dalam Wahyuni & Fauziati, n.d.). therefore, the teacher should select several aspects which support and facilitate the learning activity which is meaningful and able to learning objectives, one of the is selecting the method or strategy that appropriate to children in ECE.

In developing the pre reading skill to the children, introduction to phonology could be used to be a starting point for them to learn how to read since they need a proper instruction in reading activity which identifies some aspects such as the knowledge of phoneme, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and reading fluency (Wahyuni & Fauziati, n.d.). Furthermore, Gough and Hillinger (1980) mentioned that there are consideration in reading instruction to the children, for instance the knowledge of alphabet, phoneme, alphabetic code, and the learning resources in written and spoken form (in Wahyuni & Fauziati, n.d.; Jamaludin et al., 2015; Huennekens & Xu, 2015).

There are various methods, strategies, and model in reading instruction for teaching a language to the children. Firstly, introduction to phonology could be taken place through Jolly Phonics module which the activities are focused on the vocabulary and short story (Lloyd & Wernham, 1992 in Jamaludin et al., 2015). Besides, the essential components in reading activity are alphabetic decoding and text comprehension which are the foundation in developing reading skill to the children (Lesaux, 2012; Lonigan et al., 2013 in Jamaludin et al., 2015). Therefore, the introduction to phonology could be done through multisensory approach which is started from the smallest unit is phonics in spoken way to the biggest unit is blending the sounds simultaneously which consists of the letter sound, the structure of letter, blending, segmenting, and alteration of sounds (Mohammed et al., 2015). Then, the model of learning in teaching reading to the children has several stages. They are phase theory and connection model (Frith, 1985; Ehri, 1999, 2000; Siegler, 1996; Plaut et al., 1996 in Sheriston, 2016). Sheriston (2016) believed that the dual-route theory could help the children to develop their reading skill. Firstly, lexical route is a route to identify a word by looking at the dictionary to know how a word is pronounced properly and to help them in memorizing of the phonology itself. Secondly, non-lexical route that utilizes the word codes through the sounds when they do the spelling a word and to give the knowledge about grapheme-phoneme. The relationship of grapheme and phoneme is important in enhancing reading and writing skills. It influences the children in teaching and learning activity. This assists the children to comprehend the concept that words consist of grapheme (letter) and phoneme (sound) (Zimmerman et al., 2008 in Mohammed et al., 2015). This principle applied to teach reading and spelling to the children, especially teaching English.

Then, this theory is able to provide unique prediction about identification and spelling of nonwords.

Introduction to alphabet should be done systematically after introducing phonics. The children who understand the concept of phonics, they go further to comprehend about syllable, blending sounds, segmenting sounds, and deletion of sounds (Mesmer & Williams, 2015). Afterwards, the children should recognize the first sounds of a word could be done through two behaviours. Firstly, finger-point reading, the child should point to and pronounce words repeatedly. Secondly, word finding, the child should find words in printed texts (Clay, 1995; Ehri & Sweet, 1991; Flanagan, 2007; Henderson, 1980; Morris, 1993; Morris dkk., 2003; Uhry, 2002 in Mesmer & Williams, 2015).

Regarding to phonics, there are several methods that could be used in teaching and learning activity. They are interactive model, from writing to reading model, and from reading to writing model (Jones & Reutzel, 2015). This covers knowledge of phoneme, grapheme, letter's name, and words. The process occurs in order to give in-depth information about vocabulary and structure (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001 in Jones & Reutzel, 2015).

Practically, the activity of reading and writing could be done through phonics method. First, the interactive writing is able to strengthen the skills focused on writing concept, introduction to phonology, alphabetic knowledge, and sentence's construction. Second, the children would think and discuss how the phonics become a word and they identify alphabet which represents particular phonics, and they would read the final draft of their text in editing and revising process (Jones & Reutzel, 2015).

Teaching English as a foreign language to young learners could be done through instruction directly and coding which are able to assist them in

developing reading through phonology (Huennekens & Xu, 2015). Besides, the learning process may involve the body movements to develop children's perception, cognitive ability, and social ability (Callcott & Hammond, 2015). This is used as a connection of literacy instruction explicitly which provides opportunities to the children in developing skills such as coordination and concentration in the classroom. In line with this, Callcott and Hammond (2015) believed that the approach which integrates the phonology explicitly and body movements to the children could help them to understand the concept of phonics. Moreover, children love playing. In learning process, teacher may involve playing to introduce phonology. It aims to help the children in reducing aggressiveness, for instance a child bothers friends when learning activity occurred (Newcomer et al., 2016). Thus, play could be combined with phonics, so the activity would be more amusing and they could be easier to acquire information or knowledge without being stressful.

2.2 The Role of Environment in Teaching English in ECE

Learning activity in ECE could not be separated from environment's role such as the teacher, the peer, and the parents. They are important in supporting the children to achieve the learning objectives optimally.

First, school environment. The children would meet and see other people beside the parents. They are teachers and peers. The teacher as a parent for them when they are at school has important roles in enhancing children's development. Borg (2003 in Othman & Kiely, 2016) defined a teacher is an individual active, a decision maker to select and pick the learning materials, a sensitive person about knowledge, idea, and belief in regard to learning and teaching activities. This is supported by

Zimmerman and May (2003 in Wake & Benson, 2016) who stated the teacher is a professional individual who is capable in preparing the children to go into the higher level education, to achieve the learning objectives, to support and collaborate, to provide countless activities, thus the teacher could fulfill children's needs and interests. Furthermore, the teacher is an observer who observes the characteristics, interests, and needs of the children. Sometimes, there is a child who has special needs. They would find the difficulties to make a friendship. They love to spend the time alone and play with themselves. Hence, they have limited space to build the friendship (Laws et al., 2012; Strain et al., 2008; Hollingsworth & Buysse, 2009 in Zeedyk et al., 2016). Based on that, the teacher's role is essential to create the positive atmosphere to make them more comfortable and more joyful to follow the activities. Thus, the teacher should provide the learning activities which are proper by doing the observation.

In teaching English through phonics method in developing literacy in ECE, there should be the teacher training, particularly for ECE teachers in regard to the usage of phonics in teaching reading to the children, professional development program to evolve teaching skills, especially in ECE, and also do the collaboration with education minister in providing story books at school. Related to professional development program, it aims to develop the teacher's potential about the belief in teaching and learning activities and knowledge of language and literacy (Cunningham et al., 2009; Hamre et al., 2012; Wood & Bennett, 2000 in Ottley et al., 2015). This is conducted since the teacher's knowledge of literacy which is limited would influence the capability of teaching style, for instance in teaching reading and writing (Barr et al., 2016).

Second, peers. The teacher should be able to give chances to the children to engage their peers in learning activity

(Wake & Benson, 2016). The peers could support the children to achieve the learning objectives. The interactions among them could influence the children's ability to interpret, to respond, and to develop the behaviours physically and cognitively. It occurs to individual starts from early childhood to adolescence. In the classroom, the teacher should provide the activities in individual and in a small group, thus it may create the positive interaction among them which give the opportunities to get many knowledge, experiences, and to develop social ability. For instance, socio-drama could be used in teaching English to young learners since it provides chances to the children in sharing the ideas, solving the problems before they perform, implementing the ideas of drama with their peers, and playing a role in drama. This is important for the children to build the positive relationship with their peers to support each other (Stanton-chapman, 2015). Additionally, this activity would help the children to develop and enhance their language skill in ECE.

Third, family. The parents' role is extremely essential to develop the literacy of the children. The simple activity that can do is storytelling at home or the parents could be a volunteer in a reading activity at school (Huennekens & Xu, 2015). The collaboration among the teachers, the peers, and the parents are going to be wonderful in developing of children's literacy. The connection of them would facilitate the children to comprehend the knowledge and to assist them to be an independent learner. If one of the compositions could not be completed, thus the children's development would be imperfect.

2.3 The Instructional Media in Teaching English in ECE

Typically, the teacher provides the appropriate instructional media in learning activity for the children. Firstly, the teacher could utilize the story books in

teaching reading and it could give the context clearly to them, thus they comprehend the concept of letters, understand the function, and distinguish the advantages of the usage of the codes, and give a grounding in moral values (Adams, 1998 in Wahyuni & Fauziati, n.d.). Then, the teacher could prepare the worksheets, books, flashcards, songs, plays, rhymes, and story books of phonics (Wahyuni & Fauziati, n.d; Skibbe et al., 2016; Ahmed & Rajab, 2015).

According to the technology and information growth, the teacher should utilize the technology in regard to teaching and learning process, especially teaching English to young learners in improving the reading skill. There is a software, entitled A Balanced Reading Approach for Children and Designed to Achieve Best Results for All (ABRACADABRA) which assists the teacher in teaching reading to the children. It has three modules: (1) 32 alphabets, the fluency in language, comprehension, and writing from easy to hard; (2) 21 stories which relates to learning and teaching activities; (3) 15 stories written by Canadian, Australian, and African (Kenya) (Abrami et al., 2016). The usage of technology in ECE should be accompanied and monitored by the adults such as the teacher and the parents, hence the children do not fall into the negative things and experiencing dependence on technology like gadget which is defective to the children's development.

2.4 The Advantages of Phonics Method in Teaching English in ECE

Introduction to phonology in ECE provides several advantages, particularly in developing the reading skill and the reading comprehension should be optimal since it involves the phonics and the letters simultaneously (Lonigan et al., 2013 in Skibbe et al., 2016; Jamaludin et al., 2015; Cobb, 2016). This method assists the children to identify how the sounds integrate to be a word by looking at the

syllable, word, and sentence which all the aspects occurred through approaches based on the research (Schuele & Boudreau, 2008 in Skibbe et al., 2016).

The usage of Jolly Phonics, which is one of the approaches that could be used in teaching and learning activity, gives benefits since this approach consists of five aspects in reading, writing, and spelling. They are sounds, structure of letter, blending sounds, segmenting sounds, and irregular words (Farokhbakht & Nejadansari, 2015). Moreover, it could be combined with play and sing to construct a pleased ambience. This supports the children to memorize phonics, to influence the teacher's learning and teaching style, to enrich the vocabulary, to improve the language skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Jamaludin et al, 2015 in Mohammed et al., 2015; Ahmed & Rajab, 2015; Jang et al., 2015).

3 CONCLUSION

Teaching English to young learners in developing the pre reading skill could be done through phonics method. This method introduces the phonics as a foundation to develop the pre reading skill to the children. Systematically, the children would recognize the sounds then letters well. Besides, this assists them to understand the concept of syllables which consists of blending, segmenting, and removing or deleting sounds.

The children's environment such as parents, teachers, and peers support them to achieve the learning objectives optimally. The teacher's roles during the learning process are to provide activities which facilitate them in developing and enhancing reading skill, to select the proper instructional media, and to create the positive vibe, so the children could follow the learning process which is calm, comfortable, and amusing. Furthermore, the existence of the peers is able to motivate the children and give the best experience during learning process. The

essential role for the children is the parents who give the best support and motivation in learning activity at school and at home.

Regarding to teaching English to young learners through phonics method in developing the pre reading skill, there are several advantages as follow as: (1) The children could be easier to recognize the phonics, letters, and syllables; (2) The capability of spelling, reading, and comprehension should be improved and developed optimally; (3) The children would be comfortable and amusing during the learning process since it is collaborated with other activities such as singing, dancing, storytelling, and playing socio-drama; (4) The socio-emotional and cognitive domain of the children could be increased besides the language development.

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