

EARLY CHILDHOOD ENGLISH LEARNING: YOUNGSTERS AND ENGLISH ARE NOT A MISERABLE EXPERIENCE

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Abstract: The purpose of the study was to learn about the participants' perspectives on the basic requirements of an English teacher at the elementary level. By identifying these requirements, it is expected that more people are going to seek out English teachers because they are in high demand, not only in quantity, but also in quality. The nature of this study was qualitative. Observation, interview, and questionnaire were used to collect data from three groups of participants: four English teachers, three Headmasters, and twenty English Education Department students. The data was then analyzed using the Triangulation method. The findings revealed that the participants highlighted seven requirements of English teachers, which are (1) understanding about the management of learning, (2) understanding about the characteristics of young learners, (3) having good personal characteristics, (4) having a willingness to teach English, (5) having an educational background, (6) having a school supporting system, and (7) having a government supporting system.

Keywords: English Teacher, Basic Requirements, Elementary School

INTRODUCTION

English is one of important subject for students. Since English is an International language, learning English for the very beginning ages is needed. However, some students are afraid of learning English. In another side, some teachers are also afraid to teaching English. English looks like a very high level of subject, so that some people choose the other subject to be mastered.

This study also focuses on elementary school. As we all know, elementary school is the first stage in which children learn in a formal setting. Children would then learn how to interact with knowledge as well as social life there. Children have unique characteristics that are shaped by their environment as well as genetics when they are young. Some people regard them as having their own world because of their unique characteristics. Furthermore, children who have a strong desire to ask questions or who have a strong desire to perform "extraordinary actions" (such as screaming, walking, hitting, crying, or other actions that occur during the teaching and learning process) are viewed negatively by some people.

Here, English Subject and Elementary Level, two things that many people are afraid of, are investigated in order to change our perception that these two things are nightmares. "English is fun" and "becoming an English teacher is awesome" are two basic perceptions that this research is expected to build. It is hoped that by emphasizing basic requirements, so several people realize that becoming an English teacher at the elementary level is not too difficult. Understanding these requirements would then help teachers be a better role model for students and rebuild their confidence in teaching English.

METHOD

This study takes a qualitative approach. This method is used because this study is dealing with phenomena. Furthermore, this research is expected to reveal more than just "to what extent" or "how well" the teaching and learning process is carried out. This study would then attempt to gain a more complete picture of what

is going on in the observed classroom. Furthermore, the current study employs the descriptive method. This investigation concentrates on four English teachers from various educational backgrounds to determine how and what they present in the classroom.

There are three major participant groups. To protect the participants' anonymity and confidentiality, the research employs pseudonyms in describing them. Miss Imroatul, Mr. Wahyu, Mr. Ahmad, and Miss Umami are the first four English teachers. Mrs. Sumyati, Mr. Kurdi, and Mrs. Laila are the three headmasters in the second group. The final group consists of twenty English education students.

There are three major groups of instruments used in this study to collect data. The instruments include an observation check-list, an interview transcript, and written documents that include a questionnaire, administrative documents, and English textbooks.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

1) Understand about Management of Learning

Management of learning is a fundamental skill for teachers in the teaching and learning process. Giving students enough time to respond to their questions, providing a clear instruction and example before students begin the activity, using multiple media, providing some jokes to make students feel more comfortable, and asking students to work in pairs or groups are the indicators.

No	Practices of Teachers	Participants			
		I	W	A	U
1	I allow students adequate time to respond to my questions.	A	F	F	F
2	Before students begin their activities, I provide sufficient and clear instructions and examples.	A	F	A	F
3	I don't use any props or media.	R	R	R	R
4	I intersperse jokes throughout the lesson so that students can laugh and feel relaxed.	A	F	F	R
5	I require students to study in groups or pairs.	F	R	F	R

Table 1: Teachers' Perspectives on Learning Management

According to the table above, almost every statement that is a general principle of teaching is understood by all teachers. All teachers understand the basic principles of giving students enough time to respond to teachers' questions, giving clear instructions and examples before students do the exercises, and using media and models in the learning process.

All teachers were unable to provide some jokes as an interlude. This also occurs when students are asked to form groups while learning. These facts could have occurred because each teacher had their own teaching style. However, the learning process remained comfortable as a result of the observation analysis.

Teachers are expected to know and understand this principle because learning management is an important tool in the teaching learning process (Harmer, 2004). Brown (2001) adds that learning management is a basic requirement for teachers when conducting the learning process in the classroom.

2) Understand the Characteristics of Young Learners

The characteristics of young learners must be known by English teachers. Because the characteristics of young learners differ greatly from those of adults (Labaiky, 2007), teachers must provide appropriate learning strategies (Mooney, 2000).

The questionnaire was filled out by the teachers on a scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Based on each group of statements, the data analysis presented and described.

A. Children Exist in Their Own World

No	Practices of Teachers	Participants			
		I	W	A	U
1	The process and characteristics of learning a second language are similar to those of learning a first language.	D	D	SD	D

Table 2: The Teachers' Response on EYL Students' Characteristic #1

It is obvious that young learners differ from adults (Pinter 2006). As a result, their learning styles and characteristics differ. While teaching English to young learners for the first time, teachers discovered several distinct characteristics of children.

The table above shows that all participants agree that children's language learning characteristics differ greatly from those of adults. This means that all participants are aware of the criterion.

B. Physical activities help children learn.

No	Practices of Teachers	Participants			
		I	W	A	U
2	For children, learning through play is more appropriate and successful than learning in a formal and serious setting.	SA	A	SA	SA

Table 3: The Teachers' Response on EYL Students' Characteristic #2

Total physical response (TPR) is one of the methods advocated for use in teaching English to young learners by Musthafa (2006, as cited by Labaiky 2007). According to the table above, all participants agree that physical activities help children learn.

C. Children have a limited attention and concentration span.

No	Practices of Teachers	Participants			
		I	W	A	U
3	Children have a limited attention and concentration span.	A	SA	D	A
4	In a meeting, only one language skill should be taught.	D	A	A	D

Table 4: The Teachers' Response on EYL Students' Characteristic #3

Children, in fact, have a short term memory (Labaiky, 2007). It is not because their brains are incapable of remembering things, but because children's attention is easily shifted in the middle of doing something. As a result, it is suggested that repetition be used as one of the methods for teaching English to young learners.

According to the table above, the majority of teachers believe that children have short attention spans. Two teachers agree on the second statement about mastering a skill in a session, while the others disagree.

D. Children should be exposed to, engaged in, and supported in the language they are learning.

No	Practices of Teachers	Participants			
		I	W	A	U
5	Students enjoy it when the main topic of the class is about them and their personal lives.	A	A	SA	A

Table 5: The Teachers' Response on EYL Students' Characteristic #4

According to Yteberg (1990, as cited by Labaiky, 2007), children are egocentric. This fact explains why all activities should engage and involve students. It is expected that they feel appreciated as a result of this, and that the teachers assist them in developing their self-esteem. According to the questionnaire, every teacher agreed with this statement.

E. When learning is kept whole, meaningful, interesting, and functional, children learn best.

No	Practices of Teachers	Participants			
		I	W	A	U
6	Teaching English to children can be more successful if the language is useful for obtaining what they require.	SA	A	SA	A
7	Teaching English can be more effective if the material is interesting.	SA	SA	SA	SA
8	Kids can grow more effectively if they are given the freedom to choose what they need.	A	A	A	A

Table 6: The Teachers' Response on EYL Students' Characteristic #5

When children can relate materials to their needs and personal experiences, they would then find them meaningful, interesting, and functional (Vygotsky, as cited by Mooney, 2000). The classroom materials should be relevant to the students' personal lives. According to the table above, all of the teachers agree with the statements. Teachers should design a fun learning process because students learn English more easily when there is no pressure in the learning process.

F. Children prefer to learn holistically, using scripts.

No	Practices of Teachers	Participants			
		I	W	A	U
9	Playing dramas in English would then help them understand the language better.	A	D	SA	A
10	Grammar must be taught to children because it is essential in English..	D	D	A	D
11	If a child makes a grammatical or vocabulary error, it should be corrected immediately and the error explained.	A	A	A	A

Table 7: The Teachers' Response on EYL Students' Characteristic #6

When the language is broken down into pieces, such as words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs as analytical units, children would then struggle. Teachers are advised not to teach grammar in the form of an analytical unit because children lack the ability to analyze something in detail (Dewey, as cited by Mooney, 2000).

According to the table above, most teachers agree that playing drama is a good way for students to learn English. Most teachers were divided on how to teach grammar. Finally, all teachers agreed that if students made a mistake in vocabulary or grammar, the errors should be corrected by teachers.

G. A teacher should serve as a role model for students.

No	Practices of Teachers	Participants			
		I	W	A	U
12	Because the children do not understand anything yet, Indonesian should be used more when teaching English.	D	A	D	A
13	Modeling well by using fluent English will confuse and frustrate children.	D	SD	SD	D
14	For the child to fully comprehend, new words must be translated into Bahasa Indonesia.	A	SA	A	SA

Table 8: The Teachers' Response on EYL Students' Characteristic #7

Teaching English to young learners would be more effective if the language was used as a tool for communication rather than for translation. Translation can be avoided here because the students would then understand the language naturally through habitual action (Labaiky, 2007). Because teachers serve as role models for their students, they must use proper English.

The table shows that two teachers agreed on using more English than Indonesian, while the others disagreed. However, all of the teachers agreed that using English would not confuse the students. The translation should then be distributed to students so that they understand the meaning of the words. Although the last statement contradicts the principle of teaching English to young learners, in the Indonesian context, direct translation would then benefit students with limited basic English understanding. As a result, this act is understandable.

H. Children frequently learn in an indirect rather than direct manner.

No	Practices of Teachers	Participants			
		I	W	A	U
15	The child is constantly actively exploring his surroundings, gaining knowledge and experience.	SA	A	A	SA

Table 9: The Teachers' Response on EYL Students' Characteristic #8

True, children frequently learn indirectly rather than directly (Labaiky, 2007). pupils can benefit more easily from their surroundings here. Because all of the participants agree with this statement, it demonstrates that all of the teachers understand this principle.

It is expected that by understanding these principles, teachers would be able to do the right thing in the right place, particularly at the elementary level. Because the principles are not learned solely through English education, all teachers can learn more from other sources.

3) Possessing Positive Personal Qualities

Several personal characteristics are required of teachers to implement during the teaching process. A positive personality trait will aid students' understanding of English. Students often feel more at ease learning English if their teacher has positive personality traits.

The observation demonstrates that teachers must be patient when dealing with students' needs (Dewey, as cited by Mooney, 2000). When students acted inappropriately attractive, teachers became enraged. Teachers at the elementary level, on the other hand, should have a low personality (Vygotsky, as cited by Mooney, 2000), so that students feel comfortable contributing in class interaction. Furthermore, teachers must understand when it is appropriate to be both teachers and students' friends. These actions may make it easier for students to learn English.

Furthermore, the researcher discovered that an English teacher should enjoy the world of children. People who love young learners would then know how to interact with them, as well as then learn how to teach and share knowledge, particularly English, with them. They would then learn more and more through seminars, workshops, and other sources as they develop their ability to transfer English knowledge to young learners.

4) Being Willing to Teach English

The desire to be an English teacher is the first requirement for becoming an English teacher. Unfortunately, twelve students (60%) responded positively to the questionnaire about their desire to be English teachers. It demonstrates that 40% of elementary school students do not want to be English teachers.

Given that there are only a few people who want to be English teachers, there are several reasons why this phenomenon occurred. The following are the reasons:

1. Because teaching English to young learners necessitates a unique set of requirements, not everyone is interested in their world. (Participant 1).
2. They would like to teach at a higher level, such as Junior High or Senior High. (Participant 2).
3. Teaching young students entails a great deal of responsibility. (participant 6).
4. The salary for becoming an English teacher in elementary school is low. (participant 10).
5. It is not difficult to become an elementary school English teacher. (participant 17).

The reasons listed above are some of the reasons given by students. The majority of them cited a high level of responsibility combined with a low salary as the primary reason why only a few people want to be elementary school English teachers. Because there are only a few people who want to be English teachers in elementary schools, they deserve special recognition.

Teachers, regardless of their educational backgrounds, should want to learn English more (Brown 2001). Teachers should be aware of this condition as theories of English learning evolve on a daily basis. Teachers can improve their teaching performance by learning English more. Increased performance can help students learn English more easily during the learning process.

They added some comments about basic requirements for becoming English teachers to the questionnaire filled out by English students. "They want to learn more from the seminar, workshop, or other sources (Participant 12)," they wrote. It means that just because they became English teachers does not mean they stopped learning. They should improve their English knowledge.

The researcher discovered some comments about basic requirements for becoming English teachers during the interview with the headmasters.

(T) However, as long as the individual is motivated to improve his or her English, I don't believe this be a major issue.

However, as long as the teachers want to improve themselves in (learning) English, I do not believe this fact (English teachers from various educational backgrounds) constitute a major issue.

According to the statement above, the headmaster agreed that English teachers should learn more about English. It is expected that after those with non-English education backgrounds are accepted as English teachers, they will continue to be interested in learning English.

5) Having an Education Background

Only four (20%) of twenty randomly selected English education students agree that elementary school English teachers can come from any educational background. Then there are sixteen participants who agree that elementary school English teachers should have a background in English education.

According to Government Regulations Numbers 20/2003 and 19/2005, graduation degree is a minimum requirement for teachers' educational background. Furthermore, they should have the same educational background. As a result, the majority of English Education Department students support government regulations.

All headmasters agree that it is preferable if English teachers have an English educational background. The statements below demonstrate this.

T: An English teacher should ideally have a certificate in English education.

S: (English teachers, red.) are people who have graduated from English education, according to the regulation.

According to the statements above, all headmasters understand that English teachers should have a background in English education. Unfortunately, the current situation does not support the government's regulation.

T: However, as long as the person is eager to improve his/her English ability, this (English teachers from all educational backgrounds, red.) would not be a major issue.

S: Because what we need (English teachers with an English education background, red.) is not balanced with human resources, a person with an education background is sufficient.

The statements above demonstrate that the school lacks human resources, particularly those with an English education background. The statements also provide an answer to the third research question, which is about the basic requirements for becoming an English teacher. Furthermore, it is expected that at least one English teacher has a previous background in education.

Because there are many English teachers with various educational backgrounds in the real world, they do not require any pressure to gain an English educational background. They require special treatment, such as seminars, workshops, or trainings geared toward English teachers with no formal education in the subject.

6) Having a School-Based Support System

Despite the fact that all English teachers at SDI Puspa Bangsa are "unofficial," the headmasters still supervise and evaluate their teaching methods.

T: The headmaster is in charge of the supervising process. However, I delegated the evaluation process to others who are more knowledgeable than I am.

S: The supervising process can be carried out by reviewing the preparation reports created by the teachers. As the headmaster, I am not required to constantly monitor what the teachers do.

The statements above demonstrate that the headmasters are still aware of English teachers in their various ways. Checking the administration documents that the teacher should prepare could be an effective

way to supervise them. Furthermore, paying attention to them can improve their performance in English teaching.

There are several school regulations in place to improve the quality of English teachers. The statements below demonstrate the regulations.

T: (The headmasters, red.) granted permission for those teachers who attended the seminar or workshop as long as (the teaching process, red.) is replaced with another teacher in the classroom.

S: The teachers have become entangled with the Teachers' Working Group. This activity would then improve the teaching process's quality.

Teachers' working group (Kelompok Kerja Guru - KKG) is an activity designed to improve teachers' ability in the classroom. Despite the fact that all English teachers are "unofficial" teachers, they are all involved in that activity. This rule was enacted because headmasters treat all teachers the same way.

7) Have a Supporting System from the Government

English education students also provided solutions to the problem of English teachers in elementary schools. The solutions are as follows:

1. The government should clarify and specify about the regulation of English teachers in Elementary school. (Participant 1)
2. The education department organizes the seminars, workshops, and trainings in teaching English for young learners. (Participant 2)
3. Give a clear explanation about the important of professional teacher in Elementary school. (Participant 5)
4. Give a bigger salary. (Participant 6)
5. Give a limited responsibility. (One teacher supervises only for three different grades.) (Participant 6)

A higher salary has become the most popular solution for attracting more people to become elementary English teachers. People would choose another place to teach or another job if the pay is too low. The solutions come not only from the government, but also from those of us involved in the English education program.

In practice, many English teachers come from non-English educational backgrounds. The government appears to be unable to replace them all with qualified English teachers. The government, particularly the education department, could provide special seminars, workshops, or trainings for English teachers with non-English educational backgrounds in order to improve the quality of their teaching skills.

Most statements are agreed upon when compared to the requirements of being an English teacher as stated by some experts. All participants agree with Brown's (2001) statements about good language teaching characteristics, which are technical knowledge, pedagogical skills, interpersonal skills, and personal qualities. However, it appears that the majority of participants do not agree that English teachers should have an English educational background. It is not an easy task to replace all English teachers with non-English educational backgrounds. As a result, they require seminars, workshops, or trainings to improve their teaching quality.

CONCLUSION

Teachers who want to teach English are expected to understand only seven basic requirements. There may be additional requirements to be the best. This study aims to establish the fundamentals first, so that teachers would be willing to teach English. One important takeaway from this study is that people with significant responsibilities include not only teachers, but also school administrators and the government. After all, the last question mark would be given, why not become an English teacher at the elementary level?

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