

Evaluating English for Children Program by Applying Project Approach conducted at English Department, Teacher Training and Education Faculty, University of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, Banten

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Abstract - The program of English for children should be evaluated. It is done in order to get an ideal program. This study applied Project Approach to evaluate teacher's way in teaching, students' activities, and content of the book. The participants of this study were the students of English department and the first grade students of elementary school who were selected purposively, and also an English teacher. This research employed qualitative design. The data was taken from four sources: questionnaire, observation, interview, and document (English book). The result was grouped into three parts. The first, the result from questionnaire involved a teacher and English students showed that the content of English for children program should be changed. The second, by observing the process of teaching English for children, the way of teacher in delivering the material should be evaluated and changed. The third, based on the result of interviewing the teacher of elementary school, it can be stated that teaching learning process still used a traditional way. It affected the way how children learn. The fourth, after analyzing the content and the activities offered in the book, it should be changed both the content and the activities available in that book.

The result shows that the book has many weaknesses in terms of content and activities. It has affected the way how English teacher deliver the material. Thus, the children learned English rigidly.

Key words: children, characteristics, project approach, elementary school

I. INTRODUCTION

English Department of University of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa has conducted English for Children since 2010. It is intended to give knowledge and prepare for those who want to teach English in elementary level. Unfortunately, after running this subject for some years, it is stated that, in some schools, this program fails to bridge or to create English as a means of communication. The children still cannot use English in their life even though in a simple communication. This failure may be caused by some factors. Three of them are a teacher, environment, course material. Thus, English department of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa university and I as one of English for children lectures should consider this subject to be evaluated. It is because there are some phenomena happen in almost elementary levels, especially in private schools. It can be assumed that these cases happen because the teachers adopted the material when they learned in a university.

The purpose of this research is to evaluate English program conducted by English department of Teacher Training and Education Faculty, University of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa. There are some problems often appear in teaching learning process. Those problems

come not only from students but also from a teacher. Students' problems appear because the position of English is as a foreign language. It is very understandable when they face problems in learning a new language because there are some different language components between L1 and L2. Teacher's problems come up in running teaching learning process. There are many English teachers who treat children like adult. The teachers teach children by ordering them to sit for long periods and discuss abstract concepts that children do not understand. This condition is contradictory with Harmer's statement (2001: 38). He said that their understanding comes not just from explanation, but also from what they see and hear and, crucially, have a chance to touch and interact with.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Definition of Children and their characteristics

Many children, perhaps the majority of children in the world, are exposed to more than one language in early childhood. Children who hear more than one language virtually from birth are sometimes referred to as 'simultaneous bilingual', where those who begin to learn a second language later are referred to as 'sequential bilingual'. Intellectually, young learners go through a series of stages, progressively acquiring skills that are thought necessary by the society they live in. While on the physical side, young learners need to develop balance, spatial awareness, and fine control of certain muscle in order to play sport and perform everyday action. Emotionally and socially, these young learners need to develop a series of characteristics to enable them to fit into the society they live in.

Young children, especially those up to the ages of nine or ten, learn differently from older children, adolescents, and adults in the following ways:

- They respond to meaning even if they do not understand individual words.
- Their understanding comes not just from explanation, but also from what they see and hear and, crucially, have a chance to touch and interact with.
- They generally display an enthusiasm for learning and a curiosity about the world around them.

- They have a limited attention span; unless activities are extremely engaging they can easily get bored, losing interest after ten minutes or so. (Harmer, 2001, p. 38).

In the light of these characteristics, it can be concluded that good teachers at this level need to provide a rich diet of learning experiences which encourages their students to get information from a variety of sources. They need to work with their students individually and in groups developing good relationship. They need to plan a range of activities for a given time period, and be flexible enough to move on to next exercise when they see their students getting bored.

b. How children learn

Children learn language through play and purposeful activity, naturally and in an environment that invites risk taking, poses no anxiety, and applauds all effort. And such learning is best served by teachers who always facilitate, guide, and model this process, while being expansive in their gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice. With the focus always on what a child is trying to do, practice activities should be related to his/her actual language needs. According to Phillips (1995, p.7) the young learners learn a foreign language, and therefore the way to teach it, obviously depends on their development stages. By following the students' developmental stages, teachers will get a great advantage as to prepare appropriate activities for the appropriate level of young learners. There are some common characteristics of them that should be taken care of in planning and designing the teaching program. Having got their characteristics, it is clear that in teaching for children a teacher must pay attention and consider the activities which are going to be applied. It is because children have very unique characteristics.

c. How teacher teaches for children

Considering the multiple intelligences possessed by all children, teacher should revise his point of view in teaching. It is because there are some teachers who still judge that some students are 'stupid' because they are not good at math. Sometimes, teacher also gives negative comment to a certain student who cannot keep calm in learning process. However, if we see the characteristic of children based on Multiple Intelligence (MI) proposed by Gardner, there

will be some that can be seen as long the process of learning. Thus, in conducting teaching learning process teacher should consider MI theory. As Christian (1999b) in Ibnian (2013) proposed that MI theory provides a way of understanding intelligence, which teachers can use as a guide for developing classroom activities that address multiple ways of learning and knowing.

The following steps also need to be considered in designing a package of teaching. These steps are proposed by Shin (2003): 1) Supplement activities with visuals, realia, and movement, 2) Involve students in making visuals and realia, 3) Move from activity to activity, and 4) Teach in themes.

For realizing an ideal package of teaching learning, teacher should consider the aspects which are combined in order to accommodate all children's learning style. It is intended to explore and expose the characteristics possessed by children. Thus, gradually, the introvert students can get along with others without feeling of threaten. They can also create and keep communication with other friends. For the extrovert students, this environment can be used to learn how to respect and give empathy to others. It is because this package offers some activities which allow them to work together in solving the problem.

d. Project Approach

1) Definition of Project Approach

Chard (2013) explains that projects are defined as open ended studies of everyday topics which are worthy of being included in an educational program. Projects emerge from the questions children raise and develop according to their particular interests. He gives further explanation that rather than offering immediate answers to the questions children ask, teachers provide experiences through which children can discover the answers themselves through inquiry at field sites and interviewing experts. These statements can be interpreted that teaching learning is done based on the experiences which are applied.

2) The Structure of the Project Approach

In implementing this project, there are some phases which should be applied. Chard (2013) divides the process of Project Approach into three steps. Phase 1, the teacher builds interest in the topic through encouraging the children to share relevant personal stories of experience. As

the children represent their current understanding of the topic; the river, cars, or dogs, for example, the teacher assesses the children's vocabulary, their individual interests, misconceptions or gaps in current knowledge, and helps them formulate questions which they can investigate. As the inquiry begins in earnest, Phase 2, teachers enable the children go on field visits, interview adults who are experts, such as waiters, farmers, or nurses, for example, according to the topic of study. Children also look at books, internet sites, videos, and so on. As they learn more about the topic they use many forms of representation to illustrate what they have learned and to share new knowledge with their classmates. In Phase 3, the teacher guides the conclusion of the study and helps the children review their achievements. The children share their work with parents, another class, or members of the local community who have helped them in the process of the investigation. This final phase of the work includes the assessment by teachers of what the children have learned through the project.

3) The Advantages of Project Approach

There are some advantages can be gained from this project. First, PA can increase reading, language, and mathematics skills. Second, PA can promote positive social and emotional development. Third, PA can increase child's interest in school work. The last, PA can increase parental interest in child's education. Other advantages that can be gained are proposed by Illinois Learning Center (2013). This institution said that PA can affect some points. PA can motivate children to want to learn by incorporating rich and meaningful tasks. PA challenges children to identify and solve problems. PA can also produce positive social and emotional development. The last one is something which is quite important in the process of children's learning. It can encourage parental involvement.

4) Evaluation

According to Kiely and ReaDickens (2005), evaluation is the process of determining the relationship between different program mechanisms, the procedures, and theory constructed by the individuals involved in a program, and the outcomes which are used to demonstrate the worth of the program. This is also supported by Brown (1995, p. 217). He stated that the heart of the systematic approach

to language curriculum design is evaluation: the part of the model that includes, connects, and gives meaning to all other elements. It is in the line with the statement of Rae-Dickens and Germaine (1993, p. xi) which said that evaluation takes us right into the classroom to describe, analyze, and interpret what actually occurs when teaching and learning take place. Then Kiely and Rea-Dickens (2005) strengthened about evaluation. They gave a certain definition about a language program evaluation. Kiely and Rea-Dickens (2005) mentioned that a language program evaluation has three distinct features as outlined. Those criteria are that it creates assertions in a shared context, combines with research, and faces the obstacle of becoming public or remaining private.

Thus, based on the theories above, it can be said that in conducting the evaluation, I as the researcher will see the problems happened in the class, describe, analyze, and interpret the result.

III. METHODOLOGY

The current study collected quantitative and qualitative data through interviews, questionnaires, observation, and course materials (book) to evaluate English for children conducted at English department, teacher training and education faculty, university of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa.

a. Participants

The study involved four groups of participant: one class of semester five students, one class of the first grade students of elementary school, one lecturer who teaches English for children, and one teacher who teaches in the first grade of elementary school.

Learners

The learners are divided into two parts: University students and Elementary school students. This study purposively took one class of semester five students. It consisted of 20 students. They took English for Children as a choice subject. This study also took one class of elementary students. It is intended to see closer the process of teaching English for children.

Lecturer

An English lecturer was involved in this study to see how he delivered material of

English for children. It intended to check whether teaching learning process could run well so the students could adopt and adapt the material to be implemented when they became teachers someday.

Teacher

Involving elementary school teacher is considered as an important aspect. Through this aspect, it can be detected whether theory and practice could meet and involve each other.

b. Data Collection Instruments

For collecting the data, this study used four instruments. The first is questionnaire. This instrument aimed to get the information dealing with the content of English for children. It involved 20 students of English department of University of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa. The second is interview. Researcher interviewed the teacher of elementary school. It was intended to reveal the problem as long as she taught by using the book available there. The third is observation. The observation was conducted in the first grade students of elementary school. It aimed to see the process of teaching learning. The fourth is course material. Course material has important role to support teaching learning. Thus, researcher checked the content of the course material used in that school whether the content of that course had met between the theory and practice.

c. Data Collection Procedure

The researcher and English department had developed a course material. The material included a course description, instructor expectations, grading scale, and weekly topics. It was designed for 16 meetings included middle and final test.

To check whether this course was suitable for teaching English for children or not, the researcher had applied some instruments for evaluating the course material. The evaluation was done only one theme. The result of the data could be seen in the following items.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To evaluate English program for children, I have done the evaluation by involving some aspects. It is intended to get complete information to reconstruct or redesign the program to be an ideal one. Thus, I got the data

through questionnaire from students of English department, interviewing the elementary school teacher for getting the real problem and the needs, observing teaching learning process at elementary school students, and the source or book which is used to back up in teaching. The results can be seen in the following items.

a. The Result of Questionnaire

To know the students' response toward English for children, I conducted a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of five main topics which were developed into 10 questions. They were interest, purpose, content, difficulty, and skill. Related to the interest in teaching, all students answered yes. It means that they all like teaching. However, when they were asked about interest in teaching children, there were 16 students who were interested in children. It means that more than 50% should have passion in teaching for children. In terms of the purpose, there were 13 students who had special aim in learning English for children. It has tight relationship with the content. For doing this, they had preparation for teaching children. This preparation must involve both cognitive and psychomotor skills. These skills are very important for triggering children to expose and explore their talents. When they practiced in teaching children, most of them (12 students) got some difficulties. It is reasonable because teaching children is very different from teaching adults. It needs multi skills both for children and teachers. Teachers should have many skills to explore and expose children activities through hands on activities.

b. The Result of Interview

For this study, I took interview for the English teacher of elementary school. There were six categories of questions that I asked to the teacher. There were 10 questions altogether. The first category dealt with interest. It had two questions. Dealing with the first question, the teacher answered that she liked teaching especially for teaching children. She gave more explanation about her interest in teaching children. She liked them because children were funny and honest. The second category was about the purpose for learning English for children. The teacher said that by having competence in English for children, she could teach them in appropriate way. She added that having passion in teaching children was one of requirements should be mastered. The next

category was content. She answered for the first question in this category that she prepared all things which related to the topic. By these things children could use them in learning process as maximum as possible. This relates to the aspects that children must learn. They should be exposed and explored dealing with both cognitive and psychomotor skills. They have to think and practice.

However, in the reality there are some difficulties faced by teacher in elementary level, such as controlling the situation and keeping students' motivation. She explained when she got difficulty in teaching children, she treated them as her friends. It was intended to make the situation comfortable.

Dealing with skill category, children should learn hands on activities. It means that beside learning English children also learn how to react to give response. This activity can be used to maximize psychomotor skills. Thus, the teacher should have ability to create a class in order to be interesting.

Then, she gave suggestion for anyone who wanted to be a young learner's teacher, she or he should have good personality, love children, and also master teaching skill

c. The Teaching Learning Process

Based on the observation conducted in a certain class of elementary school, it can be reported that teaching learning process in English subject did not run well. The activities were full of filling exercises provided in a book. Those activities did not trigger students to expose and explore hard skills which demanded them to move on.

d. The Course Material

After analyzing the content provided in the book, generally it can be said that the activities available in that book just gave students explore cognitive side. Indeed, children need series of activities which trigger students do physical movement.

Thus, based on the result taken from those instruments, it generally can be concluded that the English program conducted by English department, Teacher Training and Education Faculty, University of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, should be redesigned. This decision is done after considering some aspects found in the instruments.

V. CONCLUSION

After getting certain information from all instruments involved in this research, it can be declared that the program of English for Children must be changed in some certain aspects. It is because this program is still lack of the activities which are suitable for children. Thus, it is expected that after evaluating and changing some contents, this program will be meaningful for children in learning English.

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