

The Strategy of Literacy Development for Preschoolers

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Abstract

This research aims at describing the strategy used for developing literacy for preschoolers in the institution of early childhood education and kindergarten (called *PAUD-TK Cahaya Bangsa*) in Padang Panjang city, the province of West Sumatera, Indonesia. The literacy development for preschoolers involves children in reading and writing. It is believed that effective strategy that fosters literacy skills for early childhood is required. Qualitative research was applied in this research. The researcher became the instrument of research. Observation, in depth interview, and documentation studies, and triangulation were used for collecting data. The source of research data was selected purposively. Thematic analysis was used to find the themes that appear in the research data. The research findings indicated that the teacher has applied some essential early literacy teaching strategies for developing children's literacy capabilities and influenced their positive attitudes toward reading and writing.

Keywords: literacy development, reading and writing teaching, preschoolers

Introduction

The term of preschoolers refer to those of 3 or 4 years and are developing the basic life skills, independence, and knowledge that they will need as they enter their school years. In school terms, it includes group settings for infants through the primary years of elementary school, kindergarten through 3rd grade (Gordon, and Kathryn, 2014). During this period, it is important to develop literacy which is closely related to the ability to write and read. It is believed that literacy levels predict academic achievement or school completion, vocational outcomes, mental, and physical health (Dewalt, et al., 2004; Marcus, 2006; Lincoln, et al., 2008; Hernandez, 2012). Literacy skills in children develop gradually from acting an expression to communicate it orally and in writing. The literacy development is also related to other domains of development. Children learn to utter an idea through using language as a prop to get social play begun. They begin to label, describe, question, and demand when they tell each other how they feel and what they want. Related to this fact, the preschool years have been viewed as the critical period for developing early children's literacy. In fact, throughout early school-age years there is an increase in the size and complexity of the child's linguistic repertoire and in the use of that repertoire within the context of conversation and narration.

The early school-age period is one of tremendous linguistic creativities filled with rhymes, songs, word games, and those special oaths and incantations passed along on the underground from child to child. The early school-age years are characterized by growth in all aspects of language, although the development of pragmatics and semantics seems to be the most prevalent (Marcus, 2006; Otto, 2010; Owens Jr, 2012). In addition, to mastering new forms, the child learns to use these and existing structures to communicate more effectively. Thus, those facts certainly require the right strategy in developing literacy for children at an early age by considering aspects of child development.

Method

This research is a qualitative research. The researcher observed the teaching strategies for developing children literacy in in the institution of early childhood education and kindergarten (called *PAUD-TK Cahaya Bangsa*) in the city of Padang Panjang, the province of West Sumatera, Indonesia. Such strategies were employed naturally or without any treatments from researchers. The learning activities on the strategy of developing literacy were observed and analyzed. The research subjects were principals, teachers, and students. The data source in this research used a sample of data sources purposively. Research activities were carried out for five months. Observation, in depth interviews, and document analysis were used as data sources. Thematic analysis was used as a technique of data analysis which focused on the strategies for developing child literacy employed by teachers in *PAUD-TK Cahaya Bangsa*.

Results and Discussion

Reading and writing skills theoretically emerge as children become aware of language as an entity itself and of the written word as a way of documenting what is spoken (Gordon and Browne, 2011:386). Before learning to read, children learn how to talk, understand spoken words, and to organize and pronounce sounds. For most children, this means that they are ready to read by the age of 2. By this age, children have developed enough understanding of speech and will have gained sufficient knowledge of life so as to be able to participate in play activities and games for the reading program. Moreover, it is important to teach reading to children in their pre-school years since it satisfies and stimulates children's natural curiosity, and as a source of knowledge. The earlier a child discovers this, the more deeply attracted to reading the children will become. In addition, children who learned to read and write early would not have to use time in elementary school to learn them. Last but not least, what happens in the classroom is significantly determined by a teacher's beliefs about children, teaching, learning, and themselves as a teacher and person (Arbeu & Coplan, 2007; Fisher, 2010; Mackenzia, 2014).

This research finds that the teaching reading strategy for preschoolers is undertaken by the teachers is through integrating phonics approach and whole-word approach. Nevertheless, the portion of the whole-word approach is more than the phonics approach. Phonics approach focuses particularly on phonemes. Phonics approach emphasizes that reading lessons should teach phonics and the basic rules of translating symbols into sound. According to this approach, children should get complicated reading material, such as reading books and poetry, only after they understand the rules of correspondence that connect oral phonemes with alphabetical letters representing the phoneme. On the contrary, the whole-word proponents advocate that the focus be on meaning, with the whole word as its basic unit. Whole-language approach emphasizes that reading lessons should be paralleled with children's natural language learning. Reading materials should be intact and meaningful. That is, children should be given reading material in complete form, such as storytelling, and poems, so that they can learn to understand the nature of communicative language. Through this approach, the beginner readers are taught to know words or even whole sentences and use the reading context in guessing unfamiliar words. To build phonological awareness of children at an early age, the strategies which are implemented by teachers encompass: (1) integrating reading activities with writing, (2) material and activities are simple, and (3) it is carried out in small groups.

Furthermore, it is found that there are four-phases which are practiced to embody the teaching reading for preschoolers, which are: (1) Word Familiarization; (2) Word Identification; (3) Phrase and Sentence Identification; and (4) Paragraph and Stories. Each phase involves meaningful language and is ordered so that a preceding phase serves as a prerequisite for the succeeding one. Prior phases are continued concurrently with succeeding phases. For instance, Word-Identification may continue though the child is at the stage of the Phrase and Sentence Identification. The first phase, Word Familiarization, aims to acquaint children with the shapes of written words and lead them to become

able to distinguish between spoken words of the language and their written manifestation. In this phase, children have not been taught about particular spoken words which are associated with their written word. This is reserved for the next phase, Word Identification. For instructional purposes, teachers attach word cards to objects around the classroom, such as chairs, tables, flowers, cupboards, and other objects. The words on the card are words that are familiar to the children. A number of activities are also carried out by pupils with word cards around the classroom. There are three activities carried out by pupils from easy activities to difficult ones: *Room Object Pointing*, *Word Card Sticking*, and *Room Object Matching*. In *Room Object Pointing*, pupils point to written words and objects that match those written words. They are not required to learn words that match the object. However, the target of this activity is only to build children's initial awareness that different words are associated with different objects. In *Word Card Sticking*, pupils are given a word card and are assigned to place it on an object that is named. In this activity, children see that different words are used for different objects. In *Room Object Matching*, pupils are given a word card and asked to find another like it. This activity assigns children to determine whether written words have similarities or differences. By doing this, children become familiar with the shapes of letters and find for their differentiating features.

The second phase, Word Identification, leads the children to learn written words which are associated with certain spoken words or objects. This phase requires the use of long-term memory. The children are required to store a particular visual configuration and remember the object that particular word represents it. For instance, when children seen the written word 'pineapple' in isolation, they are acquired to point to the object 'pineapple' or its picture. Various games and activities are practiced to test the children to identify particular written forms. For instance, word cards are removed from objects in the room and the children are required to place them on the correct objects. The phase of phrase and sentence identification, as a third phase, is similar to the second phase, but it relates to larger linguistic unit. It is not important that phrase teaching should precede sentence teaching. Which one is taught earlier is based on the interest for a particular situation or situations which occur in the immediate environment, such as *seekor sapi besar* (a big cow), and *seekor burung sedang terbang* (a bird is flying). The final phase is paragraphs and stories. This is the most interesting of all reading activities for children since there is an excitement to fulfill the curiosity of the contents of the story. In the early stages, children are more dependent on images or picture than text. The children tend to see the picture rather than reading the text. When children have progress in reading paragraphs, the storybooks may have fewer pictures and more text.

There are two activities which are commonly practiced related to the phase of paragraphs and stories: *teaching short-paragraph stories*, and *teaching book reading*. In former activity, the teachers introduce *short-paragraph stories*, for instance, stories that are presented at least in two or three sentences. Each sentence of a story is written on a card. The task for children is to arrange the sentences so that they form the story. In fact, such an activity can foster children's awareness of order and the sematic relatedness of sentence. In teaching the reading book, the teachers read the story book to the children and the children look at the pages and point to the words in a sentence while saying them. The teachers expose the written and spoken word simultaneously to the children. After the story book has completed through this strategy, the teachers return to the beginning of the story book. In this section, teachers read each sentence loudly and point to, and the children are assigned to imitate this by doing their own saying and pointing. Finally, after practicing this manner, the teachers get the children to return to the beginning, and this is the moment for the children to practice all of the saying and pointing.

Teaching written language for the preschoolers is parallel into the phases of teaching reading as discussed above, those are: (1) Word Familiarization, (2) Word Identification, (3) Phrase and Sentence Identification, and (4) Paragraphs and Stories. Word familiarization phase are employed continuously until the children can identify a written word without the presence of any clue. For instance, the teacher removes words from a number of objects and then children are given one of the words. They

are assigned to find the object to which it was labeled. During this phase, the children are also led to a drawing activity. This aims to prepare them to be familiar with the real writing activity in the next phases. Drawing is recommended by experts to prepare children at an early age to write (Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Watanabe & Shagoury, 2009; Dyson, 2010).

In the second phase, the children must remember a certain written configuration and remember the object that it represents. The teachers do not give any clues as was practiced in the former phase. In the third phase, the teachers begin to guide the children to write a phrase, such as *rumah baru* (*new house*), and sentences such as *Anton pergi* (*Anton goes*). Moreover, the children write phrases and sentences following the events and situations that occur in the immediate environment. In the final phase, the children are guided to write sentences that form the story. Each sentence of the story is written on a separate card, along with corresponding picture. The pictures on the cards are later removed as the children understand the meaning of the sentences. Drawing to stimulate children at an early age to write is an appropriate strategy recommended by experts (Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Watanabe & Shagoury, 2009; Dyson, 2010).

Conclusions

The development of literacy abilities of children carried was done by striving to be in line with the theories of literacy development as suggested by experts. In addressing the controversy between the phonics approach and whole-words for teaching reading for children, teachers have combined the two approaches. This research proves that both approaches play a significant role in the process of helping children to be able to read. The teachers have also integrated teaching and reading activities through four phases of the program for teaching reading and writing for preschoolers.

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