

# Teachers' Strategies in Teaching English Vocabulary to Young Learners at Sakra District

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**Abstract**— This study aims at finding strategies and problems or challenges that teachers face in teaching English vocabulary to young learners. This study is qualitative in nature trying to describe in larger detail of the phenomenon under specific circumstances. In collecting data, this study utilized observation and interview where the respondents were from three elementary schools namely SDN 1 Sakra, SDN 3 Sakra and SDN 3 Kabar. The result found that the English teachers of the three schools did not used strategies elaborated in conventional book, rather they used their own teaching preferences which involved three learning theory: behaviorism which stresses on stimulus and response; cognitivism which focuses on the inner mental activities (the processes of knowing) such as thinking, memory, knowing, and problem-solving; and constructivism which focuses on teaching students with adaptation of surrounding objects which are widely available around them. Further, the result showed that there were three sources of problems i.e. deriving from teachers, students and schools.

**Keywords**— *teachers' strategies, teaching English vocabulary, young learners, Sakra District*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In my pre-observation to some schools in Sakra, I found some teachers did not pay much attention to details regarding strategies of teaching and are prone to teach conventionally. It was found that there are gaps in teaching vocabulary such as extensively relying on their own preferred teaching methods.

Departing from the pre-observation and common problems that are usually faced by teachers and ideas that young learners are bound with multi-intelligences and characters therefore, the research is carried out in order to see larger picture of how teachers teach English vocabulary to young learners. This research focused on teachers' strategy in order to map in which part of teaching should be taken into consideration and leads to future enhancement. Hence, this research investigated (1) what strategies are used by the teachers' in teaching vocabulary at elementary schools and (2) what problems and challenges that teachers' face in teaching vocabulary at elementary schools

This stage presents some theoretical backgrounds from which this paper is based encompassing characteristics of young learners to some suggested methods and strategies by which to teach English to young learners. Unavoidably, teachers who teach at basic school will face various

characters of young children and consequently they should understand and be fully knowledgeable about children miscellaneous characters. Among experts, Brenda maps fourteen characteristics of young learners that teachers and parents should know in order to maximally optimize children potential: Firstly children have short attention span [1]. When teaching, teachers should understand that children have a short attention span, hence teachers should vary their strategies to break the boredom. They should give varied activities as handwriting, songs, games etc. or refresh them by giving icebreaking activities. Secondly, they are very active. Young children are prone to move around, they are very active, therefore, teachers should try to provide as lively classroom atmosphere as possible or teachers may teach them through playing games, role play dialogues and getting them involved within classroom competitions. In brief, they enjoy learning through playing and learn best when they learn through games.

Besides, children respond well to praising. Since they are very active and very responsive, teacher should take benefit from their nature. Teachers may build their character by always encouraging them and praise their work. Note that each child differs in their experience of language. Children may experience different language exposure and language ability so then treats children as a unit; don't favor those who know some English at the expense of those who do not know.

Additionally, young learners are less shy than older learners. In this regard, children are very absorbed and less shy towards anything that will lead them to. By understanding this nature, teachers may encourage them to repeat utterances, resort to mechanical drills. On the other hand, they are very imaginative. As matter of fact, children were born with scientific nature. In other words, they are very imaginative. To deal with this nature, teachers may use pictures to teach new vocabulary related to concrete meanings. In fact they enjoy fantasy, imagination, and movement. Additionally, they enjoy imitating and skillful in listening accurately by mimicking what they have heard. However, generally they are more concerned about themselves than others.

Eventually, young learners have limited knowledge about the world. In teaching young learners, therefore, teacher should relate to the vocabulary of their surroundings,

exposing the most basic and concrete words in early stage. This will build their long-term remembrance of the words because they have experienced the words being taught. It is to do because children have limited knowledge about the world.

Teaching is guiding and facilitating learning, enabling the learner to learn, setting the conditions for learning [2]. It simply means that teaching provide assistance and facilities to the students in order the students learn at best pace. In teaching, of course, the teachers should be familiar with steps and procedures of running the class since the flows chart of teaching emphasize different activities for different skills. For instance, there must be distinguished treatments for pre activities and main activities and so forth. With regard, therefore, the teachers should concern with phases in teaching.

Among the existed strategies, it can be summarized that Teacher should be able to identify the young learner's characteristic and the young learner's needs. Besides, teacher should choose kinds of materials and suitable strategies to the young learners.

There are many different methods and approaches how to teach a foreign language, including vocabulary. Here will be mentioned some of them that can be used in teaching young learners [3]. The auditory learners will learn more easily through verbal lessons and anything that allows them to speak out while learning. For the kinaesthetic learner, it will be enjoyable if they are allowed to move while learning. Children with this kind of learning style have a hard time sitting for long periods' time and may become disruptive if they are not allowed to get up quite often during the teaching and learning process.

Additionally, apart from the three teaching styles proposed [4], Harmer suggest some additional strategies; one way of presenting words is to bring the things into the classroom or bringing into room [5]. Words like postcard, ruler, pen all, etc. can obviously present in his way. The teacher holds up the object or point to it and says the word and then gets student to repeat it.

It is often possible to explain the meaning of word and grammar either through the use of realia or in picture. Actions in particular are probably better explained by mime. Concept like "Running" and "Jumping" are easy to present in this way [5]. In other words, teaching through gesture is useful for explaining words like form, teachers, for example can mimicry act in certain moves in order to indicate the past event being talked about (the teacher gesture back word over his shoulder).

However, explanation of the meaning of vocabulary item can be very difficult and it is suggested if giving such explanation, teachers should include information when the items can be used [4], During verbal explanation, teachers can employ many strategies to attract students' interest. For example, teacher can write the meaning (synonym, opposite, synonym mother tongue, description) in code or with scrambled letter.

There are three learning theories which are suggested by experts in order that teaching will accomplish its goals namely cognitivism, behaviourism, and constructivism. Teaching should be based on the so called behaviouristic,

cognitive and constructive theories since they are grounding theories by which people acquire the language [2], [6], [7].

Behaviourist theory is originated from Pavlov's experiment which indicates that stimulus and response work together. Deriving from his finding he adopted classical conditioning theory to explain all types of learning. He rejects the mentalist notion of innateness and instinct. Instead, he believes that by the process of conditioning we can build a set of stimulus-response connections, and more complex behaviours are learned by building up series of responses.

While cognitivism focuses on the inner mental activities (the processes of knowing) such as thinking, memory, knowing, and problem-solving [6]. Fauziati further states that knowledge can be seen as schema and learning is a change in a learner's schemata. The mind just like a computer: information comes in, is being processed, and leads to certain outcomes. So, learning is considered as an active, constructive, cumulative, and self-directed process that is dependent on the mental activities of the learner. Cognitive theories, therefore, have replaced behaviourism in 1960s as the dominant paradigm [6], [7].

The last learning theory is constructivism. It concerns with learning constructed on the premise that, by reflecting on our experiences, we build our own understanding of the world we live in. In other words, it simply refers to knowledge must be constructed by learners and it cannot be fully sufficed by teachers [8].

## II. METHOD

To collect data the teachers of young learners from three different schools (SDN 1 Sakra, SDN 3 Sakra and SDN 3 Kabar) were observed with audio recording device during teaching. They were observed three times in different grades (4, 5, 6). At the same time, syllabus and lesson plans were also observed and checked to match the EFL teachers' activities in the classroom. After each observation, a small discussion with the participants (teachers) was organized.

Secondly, the teachers were interviewed. This research used a semi-structured interview. By principle, each interviewee was given the same questions to avoid bias between interviewees and the study. In conducting the interview, Indonesian language was used to avoid the difficulties in understanding the questions posed by the interviewer.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. *The Strategies Teachers Use in Teaching Vocabulary to Young Learners*

As have been suggested, modeling and demonstration were the strategies used by the teacher when she/he taught how to say something. For example, the teacher gave example how to pronounce words and the students followed her/him. During the observation, the teacher's voice was clear and the students can hear her voice clearly. But some pronunciation problems were made by the teacher.

Secondly, question and answer were used by the teacher several times. Based on the observation, this technique was usually used by the teacher to make students more active and check their readiness before the lesson was started. The

questions that were given by the teacher was normatively failed to raise students interest but when the teacher raised his voice to sound angry it successfully awakened the students' motivation to find the answers of the questions.

Singing songs was applied by the teacher in SDN 1 Sakra in every meeting to make the students enjoy the English learning. The use of songs was good concept to make them enjoy because children have short attention. As the result of student's interview, most of them are very enthusiastic when they were asked to sing English songs. The teacher used song in order to introduce the words and to make students more interested in studying. However, the other two schools didn't apply this strategy. As mentioned earlier, this is so because teachers of SDN 2 Sakra and 3 Kabar were likely to complete task and thought that English is only supplementary subject not as the compulsory one.

#### *B. Media and Material*

The material that is taught by the teacher is self-made material. The reason for doing so because there is no syllabus and they didn't make any lesson plan to guide their teaching. Based on interview, teachers used identifying and matching task, however, observation reversely revealed the other way around in which the teacher said that they usually used matching and sequencing task. She said that "one of the tasks is she asked the students to write the number to sequence the action".

#### *C. Difficulties or Challenges that teachers face in teaching English vocabulary*

There are three sources of problem namely teachers as the problem, students as the problem and school as the problems. The problems of teaching in these three schools are intertwined where on one hand, some of the students were reluctantly to follow the teacher and more likely to play with their friends and teachers didn't provide proper classroom management and it becomes the major problem that teachers contribute. The teacher got difficulties to manage the class because every student has different characteristics and needs. Moreover, in teaching, teachers were not based their teaching on syllabus and lesson plan and that most of teachers lack of knowledge about teaching young learners

From students' side, classroom environment which refers to atmosphere of learning created dilemmatic condition for other students to take part in learning. Thus, classroom environment is concerned with the student's intention to learn. This environment situation was because of students' lack of motivation to study. It was seen through observation that students were very noise, they would stop making noise when the teacher turns angry.

Additionally, there are at least four problems associated with schools ranging from unavailability of textbook, media, electronic support such as LCD and insufficient training for teaching English to young learners. The unavailability of those supports created problem in teaching vocabulary since theoretically those items are in need of in order to scaffold the teaching and learning.

## IV. CONCLUSION

From finding and discussion above, it can be claimed that teachers of three schools teaching three different grades with the same teaching strategies. There was no special treatment for each grade; they are all treated in the same way. It can be generalised that the teachers made their own teaching preference without paying aspects which scaffold students learning such as zone proximal development and so forth.

However, though the teaching strategies were based on the self-teaching preference, the process of transferring knowledge obviously is multi-learning strategies which is the combination of behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism in a rather erratic condition. However, the recent theory is not merely the emphasis of those three learning principles; the present teaching should be encompassed to and well-equipped with the so-called humanism theory which emphasizes the idea of learning rather than teaching. It implies that the teachers of any levels should create the live atmosphere of teaching where students more active in learning and less teacher's instruction method.

Secondly, it was found that there are three overlapping problem found during observation and interview; they are teacher, students and the schools. In which the teachers have lack of knowledge about teaching English for young learners. Students also are the source of problem in which they persistently make noise and have no learning motivation. For schools, it provides no assistance for teaching such as there is no facilities such as LCD and provides no training and development program for teachers of English in teaching young learners. This study is a preliminary study which only focuses on limited number of participants. This study also researched about teaching vocabulary in short term observation. Therefore, future studies to complement this work could be done by raising the scope of study and participants as well as raise the awareness of teachers and school stake holder to provide the best possible service for teaching young learners.

In other words, this study is significantly contributed to the following people

1. For English teachers who teach English for young learners should improve their ability in term of learning theories.
2. For schools, it is suggested to provide teacher's training and development program for English teachers and be equipped with the ICT assistance.
3. For researcher, it is suggested to conduct deeper study about this theme and to enlarge the scope as well as participants of study so that the result would be the larger picture of phenomenon under this scope.

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