

Portraying Teachers' Strategies in Teaching English for Young Learners

Pipit Mulyah

STAI Sufyan Tsauri Majenang. E-mail: pipitmulyahoke@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English to young learners in Indonesia remains a controversial topic among teachers and parents. Parents are particularly concerned about their children's progress in communication and interaction skills. Many English courses and programs are rapidly attracting children and their families from middle-class to upper-class backgrounds. However, there are concerns that teaching English in Indonesia emphasizes rote learning of rules and sentence development. Additionally, some teachers lack the necessary educational experience to effectively teach young learners. To address these concerns, a study was conducted using qualitative methods to explore perceptions and strategies in Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL). The research subjects included teachers and parents. The study identified two critical factors that need attention in teaching English to young learners.

The first factor is perception. Both teachers and parents believe that starting English education at a young age leads to greater knowledge acquisition. Teacher perception received the highest score, with 74 out of 80, while parents' perception scored 57 out of 70. The second factor is strategy. Teachers are encouraged to implement appropriate strategies based on the specific conditions and situations of the school. Video-based instruction was found to be the most suitable method for student engagement and character development. Overall, this study highlights the importance of addressing perceptions and employing effective strategies when teaching English to young learners in Indonesia. By considering these factors, educators can create a more productive and engaging learning environment for children.

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, it is crucial for teachers to empower students to learn, understand, think critically, and take action (Septy Lesia & Petrus, 2021). Teaching involves shaping how learners think about various subjects and issues. In Indonesia, teaching English to young learners is part of the curriculum (Ratminingsih et al., 2018). According to Ministerial Decree No. 22 of 2006, English may be included as a local content subject for elementary students. As a result, English is taught for two credit hours per week starting from the fourth grade. However, there are conflicting ideas regarding English instruction in elementary schools. The Indonesian government has removed English as a mandatory subject in the updated

curriculum (Astuti & Languages, 2015). English is not formally taught or required for elementary school students (Putra et al., 2021). Despite this, some schools still choose to offer English as a subject. This decision is often based on the belief that English proficiency is essential for future job opportunities and to meet higher educational standards. Therefore, the inclusion of English as a subject becomes a matter of school discretion, influenced by parents' specific demands to introduce English to their children at an early age.

Education plays a crucial role in building a strong country, but the current reality of education in Indonesia is complex. Teaching English to young learners in the country remains a topic of controversy among teachers and parents. Parents express significant concerns about their children's communication and interaction skills (Siswanto, 2017).

The presence of numerous English courses and programs has led to a trend where children and their families from middle-class to upper-class backgrounds are drawn towards them (Ratminingsih et al., 2018). Consequently, parents tend to choose schools that offer English classes for their children. However, due to varying abilities to deliver English language programs, schools compete primarily based on pricing, resulting in an imbalance in the quality and standard of English education available to the public.

This situation highlights the disparity in access to quality English language education among different socioeconomic groups. The issue of English education in Indonesia reflects the larger complexities within the education system, requiring attention and efforts to ensure equitable opportunities for all learners.

Teaching English to young learners in Indonesia often involves a focus on grammar rules and sentence development, which can be challenging for students. Additionally, some teachers lack the necessary educational experience to effectively teach young learners, resulting in issues with the teaching materials and instructional methods. Several teachers have implemented interlanguage in teaching English to young learners to address these concerns (Morganna & Budiman, 2022). Furthermore, the Indonesian government has implemented various policies to tackle this issue.

In large cities, teaching English to young learners has become highly sought after by parents, leading to competition among them to have their children start learning English at a young age. Schools have had to adapt to this demand and find ways to deliver effective and efficient English language learning. The development of children's knowledge is a fundamental aspect of teaching English to young learners, and there are several theories relevant to language education, including foreign language acquisition (Ghaffari et al., 2017).

Teachers in Indonesia should apply these theories, such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner's approaches, as a general premise for implementing English for Young Learners. These theories emphasize cognitive development and highlight the importance of social interaction in language learning. Interactionism, a current theory, combines elements of cognitive development theory and sociocultural theory (Permatasakti & Basiroen, 2018). According to these experts, children's cognitive development is fostered through social contact and the support of adults, such as parents and teachers, in their English learning process.

The connection between children and parents is crucial for strengthening elementary school education. Parents play a critical role as they serve as a reflection of their children. The collaborative interaction between parents, schools, and society, known as school and family,

is essential for the overall development of children and the community. Establishing mutual trust, understanding, and shared responsibility for education can greatly benefit these relationships. Research has consistently shown that successful schools have high levels of parental and community involvement, regardless of social or cultural backgrounds. The family's involvement is vital for students' success (Los, 2011).

Furthermore, teachers' perceptions have a significant impact on student motivation in the classroom. English is recognized as a necessary skill worldwide, leading to future needs. Therefore, children who lack fluency in English may face various challenges. Parents often feel compelled to ensure their children learn English at a young age out of fear that delaying English learning could put them at a disadvantage later in life.

Teaching English to young learners is highly valued in Indonesia due to several reasons. Firstly, the global trend shows that many countries start teaching English as early as elementary school, and Indonesian children should not be left behind in acquiring this important language (Khairani, 2016). Secondly, there is a growing demand and expectation from society for children to learn English as it is seen as both a school subject and a requirement in daily life. Lastly, early English learning provides children with more opportunities, as they can develop their language skills in a safe and pressure-free environment, whereas older learners may face more difficulties with complex vocabulary. However, there are drawbacks to teaching English to young learners. Previous studies have shown that when children are taught a language in school, they may become semi-lingual, lacking complete understanding of both languages (Grigg, 2015; Kadek et al., 2021). This can lead to confusion and mixed language proficiency.

Alhidayah kindergaten follows the Curriculum 2013, which emphasizes teaching and learning through thematic approaches. While the school incorporates English into the curriculum, English classes are limited to once a week, typically on Fridays. This time constraint poses a challenge for teachers, who need to find efficient and practical methods to deliver English instruction. The objective of the study is to explore teachers' and parents' perceptions of teaching English to young learners at Alhidayah kindergaten, as well as to identify teachers' strategies in teaching English to young learners.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Young Learners

Sehan, (2018) classify young learners into four age groups based on their ages. The first group includes pre-school students, typically aged 2-4 years, who are usually still attending kindergarten. The second group consists of primary students, aged 5-7 years. The third group is made up of intermediate students, aged 8-10 years, who are formally enrolled in elementary school. The final group comprises early adolescent students, aged 11-14 years, who attend junior high school.

Furthermore, Brumfit (1997) in (Vinna Octavia, 2020) emphasizes the characteristics of young learners. They are naturally enthusiastic and eager to learn. They require physical movement, activities, and stimulation to enhance their thinking processes. Ideally, these elements should be integrated closely together to optimize their learning experience. They have a remarkable ability to interpret meaning without necessarily understanding every individual word. They

take great pleasure in finding and creating fun in their activities, and their imagination plays a significant role in their language usage, which goes beyond mere enjoyment.

It is crucial for young learners to be exposed to language that relates to their immediate surroundings and experiences, such as their daily activities, curiosity, interests, and preferences. By incorporating fun and creative activities, young learners unconsciously acquire and use the language in a natural and engaging manner.

2.2 Teaching Strategies to young learners

Teaching strategies for young learners refer to the specific approaches, techniques, and methods employed by educators to facilitate effective and engaging instruction for children in their early stages of education (Khairani, 2016). These strategies are designed to accommodate the unique characteristics, needs, and developmental stages of young learners, promoting their active participation, understanding, and retention of knowledge.

Effective teaching strategies for young learners often incorporate interactive and hands-on activities, visual aids, games, songs, storytelling, and play-based learning to create a dynamic and stimulating learning environment. These strategies aim to foster curiosity, engagement, and enthusiasm, encouraging children to explore and actively construct their understanding of concepts and skills (Ikawati, 2017).

Moreover, teaching strategies for young learners involve incorporating age-appropriate and contextually relevant content, using concrete examples and real-life connections to enhance comprehension and applicability (Dwinalida & Setiaji, 2022). They also emphasize the use of positive reinforcement, encouragement, and scaffolding techniques to support learners in their progress and build their confidence.

Flexible and adaptable teaching strategies are essential for accommodating individual differences and learning styles among young learners, ensuring inclusive and personalized instruction. Additionally, effective communication, establishing a supportive classroom environment, and fostering strong partnerships with parents or caregivers play a vital role in successful teaching strategies for young learners.

Shortly, teaching strategies for young learners encompass a wide range of instructional approaches and techniques tailored to the developmental needs and characteristics of children. These strategies aim to promote active engagement, meaningful learning, and holistic development, setting a strong foundation for their educational journey.

3. Research Methodology

The research design utilized in this study was qualitative research, focusing on non-numeric sources of knowledge such as voice, text, pictures, and images. Qualitative data is unique and relies on interpretation rather than quantitative measurements (tono, 2014). The data was collected qualitatively through a case study approach, which involved coding, categorizing, and interpreting data to explain a particular phenomenon. The case study focused on Alhidayah kindergaten, where English was taught as a subject. The participants included teachers and parents, who provided insights into their strategies, perceptions, and expectations regarding English learning for young learners. Data collection methods included a questionnaire and interviews.

4. Findings

In the findings of the study, the researcher used a questionnaire to explore the perceptions of teachers and parents. Perception refers to the ability to comprehend objects or phenomena through the five senses, and it is the initial step in acquiring information through sensation. Different individuals have different perspectives and perceptions, influenced by factors such as behavior, motives, interests, experiences, and expectations.

On the other hand, interviews were conducted to uncover the teaching strategies employed by the teachers. Teaching strategies play a crucial role in the success of the English teaching and learning process. Skilled teachers utilize specific learning strategies that enhance student motivation. Adopting appropriate teaching strategies tailored to students' needs can facilitate the achievement of learning objectives. In the field of education, discovering teaching practices that promote significant learning, motivation, interest, and enjoyment among young learners is a challenge.

Therefore, the findings emphasize the importance of teachers' strategies and perceptions in the teaching and learning process, as well as the influence of perception on individuals' understanding of their surroundings.

The researcher focused on the overall scores and averages in the questionnaire to analyze the teachers' perceptions. The discussion was guided by these two factors. The perceptions of both parents and teachers are crucial in ensuring a seamless learning experience for elementary school students.

The questionnaire was completed by five teachers who assigned scores to statements based on their views on teaching English to young learners. The scores were then categorized into three groups: negative perception for scores ranging from 20 to 40, sufficient perception for scores ranging from 41 to 60, and positive perception for scores ranging from 61 to 80. The questionnaire utilized a scale from one to four, with four indicating strongly agree, three indicating agree, two indicating disagree, and one indicating totally disagree. The respondents' initials (T.A, T.B, T.C, T.D, T.E) were used to represent the teachers.

Table 1 presents the results of the questionnaire for the teachers.

Item	Category	Statement	Responses				
			T.A	T.B	T.C	T.D	T.E
1	Goal	Students learn English at a young age	4	4	4	4	4
2	Goal	Teachers communicate instructional goals to students	4	4	3	4	3
3	Goal	The goals of teachers are consistent with school and district goals	4	3	3	3	4
4	Goal	Effective and frequent communication occurs with parents	4	3	4	3	3
5	Goal	Students are taught to apply the necessary skills	4	4	3	4	4
6	Expectation	Students have a positive attitude toward their school	3	4	4	3	3
7	Expectation	Classroom learning expectations are high, appropriate, and achievable	4	3	3	4	4
8	Expectation	All students, regardless of social or cultural differences, are expected to work toward high standards	3	3	2	3	4
9	Expectation	Expectations for students are based on the knowledge of students and their previous performance	3	4	4	3	3

10	Expectation	Teachers perceive that they can influence school decisions	4	2	4	3	3
11	Assessment	Student performance is evaluated in a variety of ways	4	4	4	3	3
12	Assessment	Assessment data are uses to improve the school's curriculum	4	4	4	2	3
13	Assessment	Student progress is regularly reporting to parents	3	3	3	4	4
14	Assessment	Student assessment data are monitoring, and instruction is modified to promote student learning	4	4	3	3	3
15	Assessment	Teachers provide students with opportunities for learning in small group settings	3	3	3	2	2
16	Development	The school plan is developing with participation by teachers and community members	3	3	4	4	3
17	Development	The curriculum is varied to accommodate the needs, interests, and abilities of students	4	3	3	4	4
18	Development	Professional development of teachers addresses the social and cultural differences in the school	4	3	3	3	4
19	Development	Teachers are involved in planning and evaluating professional development activities	4	3	3	4	4
20	Development	Teachers are involved in developing and reviewing the school's mission and goals	3	4	3	3	4
Total			73	68	67	66	69

Table 1 demonstrates the responses of the teachers to the questionnaire items regarding their perceptions of teaching English to young learners. Here is a summary of the findings:

- Teacher A: The majority of Teacher A's responses fell into the "positive" category for each item. With a score of 73 out of 80 on the questionnaire, Teacher A's perception is considered positive.
- Teacher B: Teacher B received a score of 68 on the questionnaire, indicating a positive perception according to the questionnaire scale.
- Teacher C: Similar to Teacher B, Teacher C obtained a score of 67, indicating a positive perception.
- Teacher D: Although Teacher D received the lowest score on the questionnaire with a score of 66, it still falls within the positive perception category (61 to 80).
- Teacher E: Teacher E obtained the second-highest score with a total of 69 points, also classified within the positive perception category.

According to the table, all teachers who completed the questionnaire on their perceptions of teaching English to young learners fell into the positive perception category, with an average score of 68.6.

Moving on to the questionnaire for parents, seventeen parents whose children are learning English at an early age responded to the questionnaire. They assigned scores based on their perception of their child's progress in English. The questionnaire addressed the scale issue, with four representing strongly agree, three indicating agree, two indicating disagree, and one indicating totally disagree. The parents are identified as P.1 through P.17 in the questionnaire.

Based on the responses of the parents to the questionnaire items about teaching English to young learners, the following findings can be observed:

- Two respondents, P.2 and P.3, received a score of 57 out of 60, indicating a positive perception. Their statements on the questionnaire aligned with the questionnaire's intent, emphasizing the importance of children learning English at an early age.
- The remaining parents, from P.1 to P.17, completed the questionnaire. Their scores were as follows: P.1 (51), P.4 (50), P.5 (55), P.6 (54), P.8 (52), P.9 (52), P.11 (52), P.12 (51), P.13 (53), P.14 (52), P.15 (54), P.16 (54), and P.17 (53). These scores indicate that respondents 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 fall into the positive perception category.
- The overall score for the seventeen respondents who completed the questionnaire was 894 points. The average score for the positive perception category was 52.58, indicating that all respondents provided answers within this category.
- Two respondents, P.7 (score of 49) and P.10 (score of 48), had scores below 50 but are still classified within the positive perception category.

From these findings, it can be concluded that both teachers and parents believe in the importance of children learning English at an early age for a brighter future. These perceptions are categorized as positive perceptions, as their average scores surpass the threshold for the positive category according to the interval table.

Based on the information provided, the interview conducted with the English teacher can be classified as follows:

- Formal/Informal: The classification is not explicitly mentioned in the given information. Further details regarding the setting and formality of the interview are needed to determine whether it was formal or informal
- Structured/Unstructured: The interview can be classified as structured. This is because the researcher prepared ten specific questions for the interview, indicating a planned and organized approach to gather information
- Individual/Group: The interview was conducted individually with one teacher. Only one teacher at Alhidayah kindergaten met the criteria set by the researcher, and therefore, the interview was conducted with that particular teacher.
- One-off/Sequential: The information suggests that it was a one-off interview, meaning it was conducted once with the selected teacher. There is no mention of multiple interviews or a sequential approach.
- Public/Private: The classification is not specified in the given information. More details are needed to determine whether the interview was conducted in a public or private setting.

Based on the provided information, the interview conducted with the English teacher can be classified as a structured individual interview, potentially in a formal setting, with a one-off occurrence.

5. Discussion

The focus of the research is to examine the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding teaching English to young learners. Teaching English to young learners is seen as an activity that encourages thinking, playing, and interacting with the language, rather than solely focusing on language forms and structures. The research acknowledges the need for teachers to enhance their teaching practices for young learners by considering various aspects such as communication and learner-centered approaches.

Teaching English to young learners takes into account the age of the learners, as different age groups exhibit varying levels of language proficiency. The optimal age for language acquisition is still a topic of debate, but it is commonly suggested that children begin learning a second language around the age of six and continue until they are twelve years old.

The research aims to determine whether the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) fall into the categories of Negative, Sufficient, or Positive. The data collection process involved using a questionnaire technique, where the teacher questionnaire consisted of 20 items on a four-point scale, and the parent questionnaire consisted of 15 items on a similar scale.

The results of the questionnaires are not explicitly provided in the given information. Based on the responses of the five teachers at Alhidayah kindergaten, all of them strongly agreed with the statement that students acquire English from a young age. This indicates that the teachers believe that early English learning enables students to quickly assimilate the language and apply it to their future.

The total scores of the five teachers were as follows: T.A received 73 points, T.B received 68 points, T.C received 67 points, T.D received 66 points, and T.E received 69 points. These scores contribute to the overall positive perception of the teachers regarding teaching English to young learners.

On the other hand, among the seventeen parent respondents, only one parent (P.7) disagreed with the idea of children learning English at a young age and received a score of 49 out of 60. Despite this disagreement, the majority of parents expressed a positive perception and encouraged their children to improve their academic performance.

Teaching and learning strategies play a crucial role in the educational process. Teachers need to develop unique strategies that consider the current situation and conditions, especially in the context of online teaching. It is important for teachers to adapt their strategies to engage students' motivation effectively and promote successful learning outcomes (Dwinalida & Setiaji, 2022). The findings suggest that both teachers and parents recognize the importance of early English learning for young learners, although there may be some variations in perceptions among individuals.

6. Conclusion

It is evident that both teachers and parents at Alhidayah kindergaten recognize the benefits of teaching English to young learners between the ages of six and twelve. The teacher adopts a thematic approach that aligns with students' interests and incorporates moral lessons into each lesson. This approach aims to engage students and make the learning process enjoyable for them. Parents play an active role in supporting their children's English learning journey,

providing guidance and assistance when children face difficulties. The observation of several months reveals that students enjoy learning English through video materials, which have proven to be effective in an online learning environment. The use of videos captures students' attention and encourages their active participation. The teacher's efficient time management skills allow for a well-structured learning process. Multiple stages are incorporated to focus on delivering the material effectively. The teacher employs engaging words and sentences that generate excitement and enthusiasm among students, fostering their active involvement in the learning process. Parents also attest to the significant impact of early English learning on their children. They acknowledge that English is a global language spoken in many countries and believe that starting early allows children to absorb new vocabulary more quickly. Parents take pride in their children's achievements and hope that they will face no difficulties in progressing to the next level of English proficiency.

Overall, the collaborative efforts of teachers, parents, and the effective strategies employed in the classroom contribute to a successful and enjoyable English learning experience for young learners at Alhidayah kindergarten.

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