TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS IN PANGUDI LUHUR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Absstrak


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A. Introduction

Nowadays, English has a very important role in education. English is not only studied by junior or senior high school students but also by young learners such as elementary and kindergarten students. It is a popular subject in playgroup or kindergarten presently. English as the Foreign Language is implemented as a compulsory subject to learn in Indonesia as stated in the curriculum for Elementary School, Junior High School and Senior High School.

Mastering English is one of the important skills that people need to do in order to achieve a better life. English is also used in many aspects of life such as politics, economics, commercial and trade, culture and many more. By mastering English, people can have a better job than people who do not master English. Seeing the benefits of English, Indonesian government in their educational regulations has made a decision to make English as a compulsory subject in schools.

Based on the description about the importance of English position, it can be seen that English is one of the important languages in the world. It is one of the challenging subjects in every school in Indonesia. Teaching English as foreign language for children was seen only something additional for normal curriculum in Indonesia education many
years ago. However, educators have recognized the importance of teaching English as foreign language at an early age.

Teaching English for young learners will be very different with teaching English for adult. Young learners have different needs, interest, abilities and characteristics than adults. Young learners are unique and more enthusiastic in learning language. In Indonesia, the interest in teaching English to young learners has been growing quickly. Most of parents believe that their children will get a better future if children learn English from early stage. Thus, English is given as one of the subjects in Indonesia education even in play group or kindergarten. The writer had an observation to know more how English as a foreign language was taught for young learners in Pangudi Luhur Elementary School, Yogyakarta. This paper will explain about how the teachers teach English as foreign language to young learners and what the problems in teaching English to young learners.

B. About Pangudi Luhur Elementary School and class activities

Pangudi Luhur Elementary School is one of elementary schools in Yogyakarta. It is located in P. Senopati street 18, Yogyakarta. Pangudi Luhur foundation consists of Play group, kindergarten, elementary school, junior high school and senior high school. In Pangudi Luhur elementary school, there are four classes in each level. There are no criteria and distinction between one class and the others. The students will be chosen randomly. Each class consists of 30-35 students with one teacher. English lesson was taught once a week with 80 minutes.

There are three English teachers in Pangudi Luhur elementary school. One teacher teaches grade 1, 2 and 3; one teacher teaches grade 4 and 5; and another teacher teaches grade 6. One of English teachers there said that one teacher who is most senior English teacher only teaches grade 6 because the teacher will focus to prepare their students in the next level which us junior high school. She believes that junior high school will ask high demand in English for students so that it is English teacher’ responsibility to enrich students’ knowledge.

Since the limitation of time, the writer only chose one of grade one classes to be observed. The teacher’s name is Ms Kris Nuhoni, she graduated from English Literature in Sanata Dharma University. However, she has had a lot of experience in teaching young learners. She has been teaching young learners for 14 years. At that time, class activities began at 6.50 a.m. There were some activities in the classroom. The students guided by teacher started the activity with prayer. The students learn some languages to pray. On Monday until Thursday, they will pray in Bahasa Indonesia; on Friday, they will pray in English; and on Saturday, they will pray in Javanese. Not only on the opening prayer, they will use those languages for break time prayer and closing prayer. After praying, the students greeted the teacher and sang Indonesia Raya and Pangudi Luhur’s song (Ku bangga sekolahku).

Afterward, the teacher told the students that they would discuss about animals. First, the teacher asked the students about the name of animals, mention in Indonesia and translate in English. Then, they spelt it together. In taking attendance the teacher called the students randomly and taught them how to answer it with the sentence all of those activities present in English. After the warming up, the main class activities begun.
The teacher provided some pictures of animals with unmatched names. The students should make them match. After that, the teacher put her students into some groups to do different activities in rotation. If the students have done their job, they must try to do the next activities so that the students did all of the activities. After finishing their activities, they continued to the next subject. The lesson plan made by the teacher is good; it provides detailed information and many activities. And the teacher also follows the activities mentioned in the lesson plan. However, sometimes the teacher makes some improvements in her teaching strategies and I think it is not a negative decision since young learners are not easily predicted.

C. How Teach English as a Foreign Language for Young Learners

Lynne Cameron (2001: 241) said that learning foreign language and learning the first language are different even for children. It is because the first language is a huge system that a child has. Moreover, children will meet small amounts of foreign language. Thus, they are strange for children. It can be seen that children learn foreign language based on the vocabulary and discourse. The vocabulary is the important aspect for children because it links four skills in English. Thus, a teacher must understand young learners’ development, needs, and characteristics.

During the observation, the writer found fun and interesting ways in teaching English in Pangudi Luhur Elementary School. However, handling thirty students is not an easy job. The teacher found difficulty in creating a good environment, managing the classroom, and making sure the students’ attention. To help in attracting the students’ attention, the teacher used media. The suitable media for teaching English was used, such as pictures and chants. As a result, those media work effectively to attract the students’ attention. The teacher uses pictures to explain kind of animals. Picture will help students to feel relaxed but still serious in learning process. Picture can make the students remember the words easily. Furthermore, interesting picture can encourage students’ spirit to learn English. The nature children’s characteristic is enjoyable learning and singing. It is in line with the students in Pangudi Luhur Elementary School. The students are active and interested in singing. By singing songs, they will learn some vocabulary easily such as the name of animals and their sound. The teacher also invites students to participate in singing songs and moving their bodies. This activity gives a lot of benefits for students such as practice listening skill (what they hear in a song), build their confidence (sing a song and move their bodies) and create a fun environment.

D. Some Problems in Teaching Young Learners

It commonly finds that teaching young learners is not as easy as what we think. According to the observation, we find some problems such as the different attention among the students, the limited media, and the lack of teachers’ knowledge.

1. The different attention among the students

One of the characteristics of children is active learners. “Piaget's” concern was with how young children function in the world that surrounds them, and how this influences their mental development. The child is seen continually interacting with the world around her/him, solving problems that are presented by the environment”. (As cited in Lynne Cameron, 2001:2)
From Piaget’s statement we can see that as a young learner, a child is an active learner. They learn by doing something fun, they like fun activity, they are curious about something around them. In Pangudi Luhur Elementary school, the writer found 2 kinds students with incisive different attention. When the class begin with sing a song, there was a student that too active, sing a song loudly, clapping his hands noisily and he often made his friend did not focus on the teacher’s instructions. Moreover, he sometimes made his friends paid attention to him. On the other hand, there was a student that looked so bored and did not pay attention to the teacher. He looked busy doing something beyond the teachers’ instruction; or just kept silent when the teacher invited the students to sing together. It can be concluded that there are 2 kinds of students, and both of them are potentially being a problem that disturbing class activities which are students with high attention and students that have lack of attention.

2. Limited media used

The second problem found from observation was limited media used. Pangudi Luhur Elementary school is one of the good schools in Yogyakarta. It should have various teaching medias. The teacher said that the school did not have many kinds of media such as education toys wood beams, posters, miniature toys, children dictionary, VCD for English listening practice. When teaching, teacher only used a pictured paper. The teacher also said that she already asked to the principle to be provided some children dictionary to motivate students learning English.

In the warming up, the teacher warming up class with sings a song together. The main activity, the teacher used the pictured paper with unmatched animals picture and its name. It can be seen that song and picture are used as media in the teaching learning process; it is very useful and appropriate in teaching English to young learners because they love sing and curious about picture. But in Pangudi Luhur Elementary school, the teacher in main activities just used the pictured paper for coloring, making shapes and matching the pictures. According to Oxford learner’s pocket dictionary (2000: 322) picture means painting, drawing, etc that shows a scene, a person/thing. Thus, teacher can use other media, like posters, flash cards, puzzles, etc. It is needed to use variation media to attack students interesting, so they do not get bored easily.

3. The lack of teacher’s ability and knowledge

Teaching young learner is complicated; teacher needs to consider many things before teaching. They do not need simple materials, but they need creative, fun and various materials. As Cameron (2001) said children can always do more than we think they can. So, if the teacher teaches them something, in their mind they already establish that material with their own way. Actually, the children have huge and positive potential, if the teacher does not support their need, their potential will not develop. In teaching, the teacher should make the students active. If the students are active and enjoy themselves, they would acquire the lesson that be taught quickly.

In Pangudi Luhur Elementary school, there is only one teacher handling 30 students in classroom. It is really difficult for the teacher to manage good class environment and to pay attention the students one by one. It is better if the school provides two teachers in each class. One of them mastered the English material and the other teacher only help to keep the students pay attention to the lesson. So, a good teacher should be able to create a learning environment that supports and addresses the students’ development,
needs and characteristic. Teacher also must consider their particular emotional, social and physical needs. It means the teachers’ foreign language should knowledgeable, understand and able in managing children. Because teacher is a model in the class, so the teacher should be educated. Another way is to decrease the number of students because 30 students is not effective for teaching learning process.

E. Advantages and Challenges in Teaching Large Class

The biggest problem found in observation was the large class. One teacher must teach 30 students. After observing, the writer can say that teaching English in large classes is presently still not being preferred by most teachers. In other words, many teachers teach in large classes because they have to take it. As a result, they take for granted that many problems arise along with the increase in class size. The large size of a class should not be an excuse of not improving on the traditional methods or not trying various other methods apart from the traditional ones. In fact, not all students, including teachers in Pangudi Luhur Elementary school are against the learning and teaching in large classes. As long as the teachers know the characteristics of the teaching in large classes, and adjust what and how they teach accordingly, they can make their teaching just as effective as small classes.

Kennedy and Kennedy (1996) wrote in their article Teacher Attitudes and Change Implementation that "what worries her (a Greek language teacher), however, is the size of the class since she believes that as soon as the number of groups passes a certain number, it is difficult to 'control what happens'." Phil Wankat (in Felder 1997) went even further by saying that "anything you can do in a large class you can do better in a small one". However, not all English teachers think that class size matters. Such teachers would say that good teaching is good teaching: what holds true for small classes also holds true for large ones. Felder (1997) says that “there are ways to make large classes almost as effective as their smaller counterparts.” Teaching large classes may offer different problem compare to teaching small classes but when a teacher can overcome the problem and at the same time improving the learning quality, it becomes great revolution in the teaching and learning era. In every teaching process, there will be advantages and challenge regardless to the number of the classes (large or small). A professional, teacher should have been recognized his/her class well to decide the appropriate technique. A large class has its own unique characteristics.

Hayes (1997) summarizes the problems with teaching in large classes as the following: (i) Discomfort. Many teachers are worried by the physical constraints imposed by large numbers in confined classrooms. They feel unable to promote student interaction, since there is no room to move about. Some teachers also feel that teaching in large classes is physically very deteriorating. (ii) Control. Teachers are often worried by the discipline aspects of large classes. They feel they are unable to control what is happening, and that the classes become too noisy. (iii) Individual attention. Many teachers are concerned that they are neglecting the needs of their students as individuals. (iv) Evaluation. Teachers feel a responsibility for checking all of their students’ work, and are worried if they cannot do so. (v) Learning effectiveness. All teachers want their students to learn English. They are understandably worried if they do not know who is learning what.
It is difficult to keep good discipline going in a large class. Since there are many students in one class, too much noise cannot be avoided. Some students may be busy chatting and doing their business which is not related to the topic of the lesson. The teacher cannot easily give each child the individual attention they need and understand individual character. She may not have enough books or teaching and learning aids. Besides the challenge which seems to be huge problems for some teachers, large classes offer interesting phenomena. However, there are some advantages of teaching in a large class. When there are many children in a class they can share many different ideas and interesting life experiences. This stimulates the children and enlivens the lesson where children can discuss and learn from each other. During project work, children can learn to share responsibility and help each other. This also brings variety and speeds up the work.

Another advantage of large class is safe and relaxing learning environment. In the large class, students are very active, but in the small class, everyone keeps silent. In the large class, every time a question is raised by the teacher, there are always some students who can come up with some answers. There is a sense of competition in the large class. The atmosphere in the large class is relatively better and more lively. Students from different small classes are secretly competing with one another, which enhances learning, but in a large class students are competing as groups. Learning in a large class is an interesting. They often find new friends, because there are many students in the class.

F. Strategies Dealing with Large Class

Considering that managing large classes can be very stressful, the teacher will need extra preparation. The most necessary is that the teacher has to prepare the activities that going to be applied for the students. It is also important always having an extra activity on hand in case something does not go as you expect it to. The biggest problem in managing the large class probably deals with controlling the students. A teacher will need extra energy to monitor the students and she sometime needs to be very discipline. Large classes can become out of hand when students are working in pairs or groups. At times the teacher may feel more like a disciplinarian than a teacher. To develop good discipline in a large class, teacher needs to establish the rules. Establishing a code of behavior that is created by teacher and learners together will state clear basic rules of conduct that learners understand, such as, they have to work quietly; they may talk, but not loudly and so on. When the class turns to be a huge crowd, shouting ‘be quite’ to get their attention sometimes does not work. At this time a teacher need to calm down to get herself in control, and think another way to get the students in control like asking them to raise their hand if they can hear her.

Dividing the class into group can be one of alternatives in helping teacher in managing the large class. In a large class, children pairs and groups can help each other and learn from each other. They don't get bored listening to teacher talk. Teachers of large classes can try different strategies to organize the groups to suit the children's abilities for example mixed-ability groups or same-ability group. Harmer (2007: 177-178) supports that pair work and group work will give a very valuable experience for the students since the teacher can maximize the students’ participation in every activities. It is very effective in managing a class with large number of students where it is difficult for
the teacher to make contact with every student and it is difficult for the students to receive individual attention.

Group work also can arise the students’ solidarity as they work and help each other. Harmer (2007: 166) describes the advantages of group work as follows; Group work dramatically increases the number of talking opportunities for individual students. Because there are more than two people in the group, personal relationship are usually less problematic; there is also a greater chance of different opinions and varied contribution. It encourages broader skill of cooperation and negotiation and it more private than working in front of the class. It promotes learner autonomy by allowing students to make their own decision in the group without being told what to do by the teacher. Although we do not wish any individuals in group to be passive, nevertheless some students can choose their level of participation. To monitor the groups, the teacher sometimes needs to move around the classroom to see what progress learners are making and what problems are coming up. She can give advice, encouragement and extra individual help where it is needed. The teacher can also find help from the student. She can give a chance for the capable students to be the leader of the group and help other students. Sometimes a teacher needs to step out from the group crowd and lead the class from the front. This action will provide the students a space to work on their own and give them responsibility in maintaining their learning process and the teacher can observe the class as a whole organization.

A Classroom is a limited space for energetic activities such as role-playing. Using the environment outside the classroom offers a new tempting experience. School gardens or halls, offer different space when children get noisy or bored, and helps to reduce overcrowding. However, setting up outdoor activities clearly and carefully and monitoring them is required, because some students may be very active. If it is necessary appointing responsible group leaders who can help maintain discipline. They can also give out and take in work for the groups, and explain what groups must do. When observing the students work, the teacher summarizes the processes, which students are working which are not working. It will help the teacher in summarizing and assessing the process of learning. Finally use the teacher’s note to review common errors as a whole group after an activity is completed. The notes can be used as a teacher’s reflection, what success and what is fail in a large class and make revision on the next section.

F. Conclusion

Based on the observation, it can be concluded that teaching English for young learners is not simple matter, many things influence these activities, as a good teacher we must creatively create classroom management, materials etc. Many media that can be used, but songs and pictures are the most effective and enjoyable media, by using picture we can teach vocabulary easily. But it is important to choose a picture for which the students already know most of the vocabularies they need to describe it. And about chants (songs) like Lynne Cameron said that “Chants provides meaningful writing practice as they can be carefully copied out and illustrated” (Teaching Language to Young Learners: 65). As a creative teacher, we can use the same songs again in different lesson to motivate the students and to build students’ confidence. If the students familiar with what they listen and say, they will feel more secure about learning English.
And to solve the problems, as a teacher we must consider that children bring to language learning their curiosity and eagerness to make sense of the world. They will receive the most demanding tasks with enthusiasm and willingness. So teacher of young learners should provide techniques to reach the learners’ motivational level and confidence. When the students get bored, the teacher has to be creative in selecting interesting activities, and must provide a great variety of them. When children need help to learn language, teacher should apply his strategies enjoyable, meaningful and full of practice.

For choosing the right media the teachers should be aware. Actually many media can be used, but it must be remembered that teaching young learners is different from teaching adults; so choose the effective and interesting one to make our students are interested and active. Because when the students are active, engaged, and enjoying themselves, their ability to learn and master new vocabularies and linguistic functions is much higher than if they are simply learning by memorization or drills.

About the large classroom, most teachers agree that teaching a small group of students is easier, more enjoyable, and less time consuming than teaching a large group. Unfortunately, due to budgets, space, or lack of teachers, many ESL schools only offer large classes. Considering that young learners are active learners and they need to socialize and interact with others in learning language, so teachers should design a suitable class for them. The Indonesian government suggests that the number of students in every class should be 28 students for Elementary School (SD/MI), and 32 students for the Secondary school and High school, yet this is not an ideal number for a Language class. In spite of the difficulties, large classes offer tempting experience in managing class organization. Before coming to the class, teachers need to prepare the materials and activities for the students; they need to establish the rules to control the students. Dividing the class into group can be one of alternatives in helping teacher in managing the large class. It is very effective in managing a class with large number of students where it is difficult for the teacher to make contact with every students and it is difficult for the students to receive individual attention. Teachers’ notes are very valuable for making summaries of the classes’ achievement and for making better improvements in the future classes.

So there is no reason for teachers of giving up to large classes and not improving their teaching techniques. Teachers should see large classes as challenges and when they success in improving the quality of students’ learning progress, it will become great satisfactions of all teachers.
REFERENCES