



## Teaching English to Young Learners in Indonesia (Pros and Cons)

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### ABSTRACT

Teaching English for young learners in Indonesia still invites the controversies among the educators and psycholinguists that concern on learners' development in thinking and communication. Because teaching English for young learners in Indonesia seems to force them in knowing the rule and forms of the sentence. In addition, some of the teachers who teach English for young learners have not the appropriate educational background that can teach the younger as well as the objective wish. Actually, there is not any regulation or decisions that obligate the school to teach English to young learners. It only depends on the school itself. In this paper, the writer would like to describe the teaching English to young learners in Indonesia in the side of its implementation and also the pros and cons based on the second language acquisition experts.

*Keywords:* language acquisition, theory of young learners, pros and cons of teaching English to young learners, teaching English to young learners in Indonesia.

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### INTRODUCTION

English is the international language which is used in most population in the world, therefore it is taught from the primary to university, in the primary level the English teaching process is introduced to know the language used in communication. Indonesia is a nation in which the most population used Bahasa Indonesia as the lingua franca, and English is considered as a foreign language. But in most central cities in Indonesia, English is used on many occasions in delivering speech,

material and also the message in one interaction.

Up to now in Indonesia, the appropriate age for introducing English as a second language to young learner still invites many controversies from many education experts, and it is still being unresolved issue in the field of second language acquisition up to now, because age is one of the crucial issues in the field of child second language acquisition and their cognitive development. In addition, there is not any regulation which is obligated the

school to give the English subject since kindergarten to elementary school so that there are many researchers that point out both the benefit and drawback of introducing a second language to the young learner. Are young learners better than older learners in acquiring the second language? Does early exposure to the target language field get a better result? In addition, those questions are not easy to answer only with “yes” or “no” expression to those questions. It needs several theories and evidence to support them.

The decision which taken by the ministry of national education no 060/U/1993 on 25<sup>th</sup> of February 1993 about the elementary curriculum with the appendix 1 consists of main subject that used as a lead in developing curriculum in the young learner classroom, the objective of teaching in the elementary school and the material which is taught in the elementary school and junior high school (Nababan, 1993). This decision should become the leader to teach young learners in many subjects. Actually, young learners did not need the material of the subject but far from it, they need to know how the introduction of language and how to use it in real communication.

Today the writer finds the education system in Indonesia is going rapidly. Many schools offer English subject to be taught in formal school since playgroup to university. The school also determined to use bilingual in teaching process to young learner, even though the government did not give any regulation to held the English subject in young learner classroom and these situations carried the writer to describe how was teaching English to young

learner applied in Indonesia, fully with its pros and cons based on the researcher in language acquisition.

### **Introduction to Second Language Acquisition**

Language is an important means to convey message and information to other people, we need language to share information and to build relationship with others. Since the people were born they have to communicate with their environment directly by their own language because the expected cry of a newborn baby is the first sign of human communication, language acquisition process can be seen as a running parallel throughout a child’s life every day. The process begins in the early life of human and requires a healthy start, sufficient opportunities, and exposure to care giving environment that allows the child’s innate predisposition to learn to communicate to function (Rossetti, 2001).

The process of receiving language has many ways, it depends on the individual, and the situation of learning and acquisition, learning is considered as a conscious process, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk with them, while acquisition is a process by which children unconsciously acquire their native/first language. In language acquisition, the focus is on communication and reception of a message in the interaction process.

There are many kinds of language used in communication, native language, second language and also foreign language, In Indonesia English is used as a foreign language while Bahasa Indonesia acts as second language,

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Second Language Acquisition is defined as any language other than the first language (Ellis, 1994) in the term of SLA it contains a different between English as second language and also as a foreign language. They are used to refer to the context which the language learned and used in communication, for example, in United State the people who were born there and used English as their lingua franca in all their activities and it is used in the official language as medium of communication and transactions. The English here called with the second language, on the contrary, in Indonesia, English is considered as a foreign language because English is learned only to explain the material subject in classroom and it is not used in the real communication.

### **Theories of English for Young Learner**

Teaching English to young learners invites the researcher to find out the theories and proofs whether the introduction English as material subject taught in young classroom good or not, and does it influence their cognitive in language development? Here some of the theories (put forth by Piaget, 1967; Vygotsky, 1962; & Brunner, 1996) show the inevitable link between the cognitive and language development in children, Piaget's theory reiterates that any kind of teaching can be effective only when the child is able to assimilate what is said and done, a concept he called as "learning readiness". Teaching by asking questions and by demonstration can influence the intellectual development of children only when are ready for it (Yuvaraj, 2009).

When the children learn with appropriate age it will make them easy in

accepting the material because the children learn based on what they see, and in this case the role of teacher is more expected in giving good material to children, because in this process the children will imitate on what the teachers do in classroom and it is appropriate with the following theories which put by some researchers to show the children habit in accepting materials.

Children in Indonesia is coming from a different culture with the different language, and they have their own different native language with make them easier in communication, English as a foreign language which is taught here should tend the appropriate age for the learner to learn English. Because not all the children have the learning readiness in learning foreign language, they should have completed enough in mastering their native language to learn other languages easily. They proceed through early stages of syntactic and more phonological development faster than children, and age-related constraint begin to set in as early as six for suprasegmental phonology, these constraints would make it increasingly difficult for learner to acquire the second language without an accent, and it led to the existence of critical period that the learner should learn second language after which of them had complete mastery of their first language (Lennenberg as cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991).

### **Teaching English to Young Learner in Indonesia**

Based on the previous research that has done by Nilawati, she said that Indonesia is an archipelagic country

which encompasses an estimated 17,508 islands, only 6,000 of which are inhabited. Indonesia's 238 million people make it the world's fourth-most populous state. The official language is Indonesian language or *Bahasa Indonesia* which is used in administrative offices, schools, science, and mass-media (Alwi as cited in Hadisantosa, Huong, Johnstone, Keyuravong, & Lee, 2009). And English is used as a foreign language that is used in certain occasions with some people.

Indonesia has 726 local languages, second-ranked as language diversity laboratory in the world after Papua New Guinea which has 867 languages (SIL as cited in Hadisantosa, 2009). There are at least 13 large-scale local languages with at least one million speakers. In addition to that, there are hundreds of local languages with less than one million speakers which with the advent of globalization can become potentially endangered or even extinct.

Indonesia implemented teaching English to young learner since 2004 which is considered as local content in the elementary school. In addition, English is taught in different objective without any regulation that leads the teacher in teaching. Basically, in English young classroom, the teacher should have various strategies in attracting the learner in studying; they should introduce the function of language as a means of communication and make them joyful in using it.

To acquire language, the learner should have great motivation in getting and practicing it as a way to make it memorable, and many factors that can influence the learners in acquire the

language, there were: environment, motivation, learners, teacher, and facilities. These factors enable learner in learning the language easily. In the reality, we find there is not a book that used in teaching which is appropriate with the children in improving the language, the content of the book serve the task and the translation that did not invite them to use it in communication but make them worry to use and take it as a language. Because of this, the young learners learn language not from only from the book but also from the environment which supports them.

In acquiring language the children should get an interesting thing that can motivate them in using it, because the children is easy to get any language that can create a mind map in their hemisphere, younger learner has not developed social attitudes towards the use of language, therefore they are cognitively "open" to another language. In acquiring language, the students usually need time to feel interesting with the language they learned, when they learned language they do not need to know about how to use the language, but the important one they know to use and practice it. But after age 12 children develop their abstract thinking with the final stage of cognitive development and they are predisposed to recognized differences and similarities, think flexibility and de-center (Chodidjah, 2011).

Actually children learn at different rate, the speed of learning is influenced both by innate abilities and environment, and the development of language acquisition of all children occurs gradually through interaction with

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people and environment, and naturally the young learners are keen, enthusiastic, uninhibited and can be easily motivated through their interaction among the environment (Cameron, 2001). In addition, those are the reasons on how the children learn a second language easily.

Leont'ev (1981) in their book "Psychology and the Language Learning Process", stated that Language learning in an early age of a child (6 - 12 years old) has a deceptive effect. His language development will be greatly affected by his experience in learning the language. When he has undergone the right track of learning his language acquisition will develop smoothly.

Actually, this view warned the teaching language process to give good teaching to the young learners on the side of the teachers' competence. Because the teacher has the main role in deciding the good material which is suit to the learners' mind without forcing them in learning, the learner will see the teachers' use the language as the motivation for them in learning.

Because teaching English for young learners in Indonesia is not the one content of the curriculum and it is considered as only the local content of the school, so the book which is used as the guide is not served, therefore the teacher should seek the appropriate book which is used as the teaching materials and the methods used should be interesting and joyful to the learners. Besides, the teacher also must tend the psychological of learners themselves.

### **CONCLUSION**

**T**eaching English for young learners basically is the unique activity which invites the learners to think, play and communicate with the language, and this activity should attract them not to force them in knowing the forms or the structure of the language, because teaching English for the primary learners did not have any regulation that can force the school to give the teaching or not.

Actually learning language in the term of younger age is better in the side of pronunciation and exposure of speaking, it will enable them to speak more fluently and it should make them as native-like. But one thing that should be concerned by the teachers that teaching English to young learners should let them to speak and express their thought using the language and not make them confuse in using the form of the language, because when they make interaction using their own English language it will make them interested in language and consider English as the real mean for communication and taking interactions with others.

Actually the younger can acquire the language with practicing and understanding in using the function of language as a means to express their willingness, and it can be concluded that there are different acquisition process and sequences faced by children and adult, a younger learner may receive simpler input and older learner may obtain better prepare to negotiate it with, and the evidence here that the younger produce clearest for phonology and also

exist for accent recognition and listening comprehension. On the contrary, older children such as isolated and deaf children starting sign language late, also start off faster, presumably because the adult had got their greater cognitive maturity, and if they begin too late, however, they will stop far short of native-like abilities, a fact widely accepted as evidence of maturational constraints on child development stage. Hopefully, this paper will give a clear explanation about English to young learner, and the writer hopes that it will get the suggestions from everyone who read it to make this paper better and give advantage for others.

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