TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TO THE BEGINNERS

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Abstract

This study aims to find out the appropriate method to teach English to the beginners. Also, the finding of this research is for publication in the journal. This study is conducted by using an online qualitative survey technique. The subjects of this study were teachers who teach English for beginners in Pontianak and its surrounding. The data were collected by a set of close-ended statements in an online questionnaire and also an online interview. The findings showed that various methods can be applied in teaching English to beginners, and those methods depend on the students’ learning style. Since students’ learning styles differ, teachers may use various methods in their classrooms. However, not every method is effective in teaching English to beginners. Therefore, teachers need to choose appropriate methods carefully.

Keywords: Teaching English, Teaching Beginners, English Language Teaching.

Until this time, most teachers are still searching for appropriate techniques to teach English to beginners. Some may believe in the way a child learns their mother tongue. However, this technique did not succeed because there is a significant distinction between the English language and the mother tongue (native language). This distinction is one factor contributing to the difficulties. Therefore, in this study, the writer intends to contribute ideas on what might be suitable for teaching English to beginners. It means how the English language is introduced to those who have never learned it before. From my observation, English is still difficult for junior or senior school students even though they have studied it for three or more years. The output of this study is to find out the appropriate technique for teaching and learning the English language. Indonesia is a big country where the majority of people live in rural areas. They do not have access to any English-speaking communities, and other supporting structures are limited. Furthermore, there are not always English teachers present in some areas. This condition pushes the researcher to find solutions for how those students may learn the basics of the language.

The aim of this study is to find out how the English language is taught to beginners or those who are learning it for the first time. In Indonesia, English is the...
only foreign language studied formally at school by junior and senior high school students. It means that English is not taught in kindergarten and primary schools, which might be why those students are still weak in English. On the other hand, language is better learned at an early age. Different countries have varying views on children’s education. Parents and children have their uniqueness. Some children may think more maturely than their age, and some may learn faster than others. In cities or towns, children learn earlier because the facilities support these activities, such as kindergarten or playgroup institutions where students can learn and socialize with others. These facilities are present in many areas of the country. Moreover, most parents cannot help their children due to limited or low education status, making the problem more complex. To have appropriate techniques in teaching, the writer proposes an idea for teaching English to beginners.

Teaching beginners is not the same as teaching older students. They have unique requirements that must be met by the teacher. Teaching English to beginners involves guiding and assisting students aged seven to eleven in their activities of learning, knowing, understanding, and comprehending ideas, attitudes, values, skills, and information in English through the use of tricks and strategies. These strategies help change and redefine their thoughts about their daily surroundings as foreign language learners.

Cameron (2002) contends that the ongoing expansion of teaching English to beginners poses several challenges. Beginning to learn English at a younger age may not result in automatic advancements in their proficiency unless the education system and foreign language teaching adapt to meet new challenges. Cameron also stated that teachers of beginners must have: (a) an awareness of how children think and learn; (b) skills and knowledge in spoken English to conduct whole lessons orally; (c) an ability to identify children’s interests and use them for language teaching; and (d) the capability to teach initial literacy in English.

In contrast, Brown (1994) states that adults have a difficult time acquiring a native-like accent because this ability is almost non-existent. Children who learn a second language after the age of five may have a physical advantage because phonemic control of a second language is still physically possible while retaining the mysterious plasticity of a young brain. It is not surprising that children learn to pronounce while adults do not because pronunciation requires the control of many muscles (Brown, 1994, p. 51).

Based on the preceding concepts, we know that young learners can quickly sound out their new language and become native speakers. This is one reason why some experts believe that teaching young learners is a good idea. A child can master the new language like a native speaker, especially in pronunciation. "As a general rule, it can be assumed that the younger they are, the more holistic learners they would be," Phillips (1993, p. 7) concludes.
The researcher found some previous studies related to this research. For example, the study titled "Teaching English for Young Learners: Through the Eyes of EFL Teacher Trainers" conducted by Damar, Gürsoy, and Korkmaz (2013). Their study focused on teacher trainers' perspectives on the appropriate age for L2 learning and the appropriate methodology for teaching English to young learners. They gathered information through survey-style data collection. The findings revealed that EFL teacher trainers prefer language education to begin in the first grade and even earlier during pre-school. They emphasized the importance of appropriate methodology and assessment techniques consistent with children's cognitive, emotional, and physical development.

METHOD

This research is a qualitative study. The researcher used the descriptive analysis method to describe the data about teachers’ perceptions in teaching English to beginners. This study aims to describe the appropriate method, and there may be one recommended method for teaching English to beginners. The research described suggested methods for teachers of English to apply at schools or outside school settings.

The subjects of this research were picked randomly and focused on teachers who teach English to beginners in Pontianak and its surrounding areas. To obtain valid and reliable outcomes, the researcher used qualitative survey techniques. The data in this research were collected through questionnaires covering teachers’ views on teaching English as a foreign language to beginners. This is typically used to determine the current status or situation in a survey format that subjects in a study complete and return to the researcher (Creswell, 2012). The questionnaire was conducted through Google Forms. The researcher adapted the questionnaire from Othman and Kiely (2016). An online interview session was also conducted through WhatsApp with several participants to provide additional information about their teaching. The research procedure steps are as follows: (1) Spreading the questionnaire; (2) Collecting the results; (3) Conducting interviews with some participants; (4) Interpreting data from both the questionnaire and interviews; (5) Describing the interpretation; (6) Making conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The researcher distributed the online questionnaire to teachers on Saturday, 5th August 2023, through WhatsApp. After two weeks, on 20th August 2023, 22 teachers had filled out the form. The data can be seen in the chart as follows.
To answer the first research question, the researcher analyzed the findings from the questionnaire. Based on the questionnaire results, most teachers showed positive attitudes toward using singing, role-playing, and games in teaching English to beginners. However, some teachers prefer teaching their students reading and writing. Hence, it can be concluded that the appropriate method to teach English to beginners is an engaging one for the students, such as through singing, role-playing, and games.

In order to strengthen the researcher’s interpretation, an interview was also conducted. The interviewees volunteered to join the interview, consisting of one male teacher and two female teachers. The interview was conducted on Sunday, 27th August 2023, through WhatsApp. There were six interview questions as mentioned in Chapter III:

- How long have you taught the English language to young learners?
- What methods do you usually use in teaching English as a foreign language to beginners?
- Do you think it is better to teach beginners vocabulary or grammar in their early stages of learning?
- Based on your experience, what is the best method to teach English to beginners?
- Do you think it is easy to motivate beginners to learn English?
- In your opinion, is it important for a teacher of young learners to have special training?

To answer the second research question, the researcher analyzed the findings from the interview. Based on the interviews, the three teachers had different methods for teaching English to beginners: the direct method, grammar-translation method, and TPR (Total Physical Response) method. These methods are distinct approaches for teaching English to young learners, each with its effectiveness and characteristics.

The direct method emphasizes oral communication over written
language, promoting immersion and practical language use. It encourages students to think in English, which is beneficial for young learners as it fosters fluency and reduces the need for translation. However, it may require a skilled teacher to maintain student interest and engagement.

The Grammar-Translation Method relies heavily on translating between the native language and English. While it can help young learners understand English grammar and structure, it often falls short in promoting practical speaking and listening skills. It may be more suitable for older students aiming for literary or academic proficiency.

The TPR method is highly effective for young learners because it engages them through physical actions and commands. Students associate vocabulary with actions, making learning enjoyable and memorable. This kinesthetic approach helps develop listening comprehension skills and allows children to acquire language naturally, similar to their first language acquisition.

In summary, the TPR method excels in making English learning fun and engaging for young learners, while the direct method encourages spoken fluency. The Grammar-Translation Method, although effective in some contexts, may be less suitable for young learners due to its focus on translation and limited oral practice. The choice of method should consider the specific needs and goals of the young learners and the skills they wish to develop in English. Hence, the answer to the second research question is that not every method is effective in teaching English to beginners.

REFERENCES