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An Analysis of Teachers Use of Hands-On Instructional Media on Students' Engagement in The English for Young Learners' Classes (A Case Study at SDN 1 Terong Tawah)

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Abstract: This study investigates the implementation process, focusing on teaching methods, challenges encountered, and outcomes achieved. Employing a qualitative research design, data were gathered through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and analysis of lesson plans and teaching materials. Findings reveal that while teachers employ innovative strategies to engage students, their efforts are constrained by insufficient training and limited institutional support. Student engagement and comprehension vary, influenced by both instructional methods and the learning environment. The findings suggest that enhancing teacher training programs, providing adequate resources, and fostering collaboration among educators and stakeholders can significantly improve the effectiveness of the local content curriculum. Policymakers must prioritize systemic support to address challenges and ensure English instruction contributes effectively to students' language development and academic success.

Keywords: English for Young Learners, Hands-On Instructional Media, local content curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

It has thus made the role of English indispensable in today's interconnected world, whereby proficiency in this language acts like a key to most opportunities in education, business, and technology. Having turned into the lingua franca in international communication, it facilitates cross-border collaboration and global exchange. In Indonesia, English enjoys a unique status as a foreign language while being integrated into the educational framework. Historically, its inclusion in the primary school curriculum was seen as a strategic effort to prepare younger generations for future global competitiveness. Despite its removal from the national curriculum in 2013, English has continued to be in high demand; most schools still offer the subject as an elective to meet the demands of parents and society at large (Kaltsum & Habiby, 2019). This sustained focus demonstrates the belief in English as a skill necessary for success in higher education and the workplace alike. Arif (2015) and Zein (2016) further present early English education in Indonesia as part of a broader global trend in language acquisition. Researchers have shown that younger learners are better equipped to learn new languages, and thus early intervention is key. Indonesian primary schools that continue teaching English do so because of increased demand due to a multilingual competence for the globalized economy. Parents and educators alike regard English as a means to unlock opportunities beyond Indonesia and, thus, an important part of modern education. However, the mismatch between policy imperatives and local enactments has produced a divided landscape in which both quality and access to English teaching are widely different across schools and regions.

Teaching English to young learners, particularly in the Indonesian context, presents unique challenges. Unlike older students, young learners, typically aged 6 to 12, exhibit distinct cognitive and emotional characteristics that influence their learning processes (Piaget, cited in Jun, 2024; Harmer, 2015). They find the perfect environment to be one of play, interaction, and sensory. In this, they are inclined by nature to experiential and exploratory learning. However, these learners equally need activities that are dynamic, coupled with a restricted span of attention-one that is indeed a challenge to educators who had been used to

traditional approaches in teaching through lectures. These developmental needs call for innovative, flexible instructional approaches that emphasize participation and interaction.

Hands-on instructional media have been one of the most effective ways to engage young learners through active, hands-on, and multisensory learning experiences. Constructivist theories of learning focus on active learning wherein the learners construct knowledge based on their meaningful interactions with the environment (Schunk, 2012; Hattie & Yates, 2013). By integrating physical objects, digital tools, and activities that require manipulation and experimentation, hands-on instructional media make abstract concepts tangible and accessible (Clements & Sarama, 2014; Bates, 2019). Examples include the use of flashcards, building blocks, interactive whiteboards, and digital simulations, all of which provide young learners with a multisensory approach to education. Studies have indeed proven that active learning strategies develop higher motivation, improve retention, and deepen understanding. For example, language classes can integrate role-playing activities while mathematics classes can use manipulatives to make lessons fun and at the same time develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Van de Pol et al., 2019; Beers et al., 2016). These benefits extend to creating inclusive classrooms that cater to diverse learning styles, thus helping to ensure equity in educational opportunities.

Despite these obvious advantages, there are various significant barriers to the adoption of hands-on instructional media in Indonesian schools. The main obstacles, among others, to the application of these methods cited by teachers include a lack of resources, inadequate training, and time pressures (Musthafa, 2010; Mahnun, 2012). Traditional approaches to lecturing dominate, reflecting both logistical challenges and pedagogical norms deeply ingrained. Professionally developed materials matching the Indonesian context are also not available, adding further complications in bringing hands-on strategies into routine classroom practice. The theoretical framework supporting the use of hands-on instructional media includes Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Piaget's stages of cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) focuses on the role of social contact and scaffolding in learning, pointing to how tools and media can serve as bridges between what a learner currently can do and what he or she is capable of becoming. Jun's emphasis on concrete operational experiences also supports the use of manipulable materials to promote understanding for young learners (Jun, 2024). These theoretical perspectives reinforce the value of active, student-centered learning environments.

International research also corroborates the effectiveness of manipulative instructional media. Research in countries like the United States and Australia has placed added emphasis on their role in teaching mathematics and science, showing how manipulative tools help illustrate these complex concepts in meaningful ways (Clements & Sarama, 2014; Beers et al., 2016). Hands-on media have, in this respect, played an important role in the UK and Europe in developing language acquisition and intercultural understanding by offering young children possibilities of contact with other cultural contexts through practical engagement. This is reiterated by Bates (2019) and Van de Pol et al. (2019), hence underlining the versatility and universal applicability of hands-on instructional methods across disciplines and cultural settings. In Indonesia, the use of hands-on instructional media integration is still not well established and hence is at a pressing research-and-intervention need. This paper, therefore, seeks to contribute to bridging this gap by investigating the use of hands-on instructional media in EYL classes at SDN 1 Terong Tawah. Based on this, the study explores their impact on students' engagement and the challenges faced by the teachers with practical recommendations. Results are expected to inform policy and practice in the pursuit of more effective, inclusive teaching strategies across Indonesia.

The objectives of this study address the wider aims of improving teaching practices and improving learning outcomes for young learners. By investigating the nexus between policy, practice, and pedagogy, the research contributes to the discourse on enhancing English language education in Indonesia. It also offers a guideline on how manipulative instructional media can be integrated into the national curriculum on both theoretical and practical dimensions of implementation. This study aims to bridge the gap between theoretical insights and practical applications, showing how hands-on instructional media can transform EYL contexts. Empirical evidence and practical guidance will be provided to help educators create an engaging,

equitable, and effective learning environment. It eventually also hopes to influence educational policy and practice toward the establishment of a more vibrant and inclusive educational setting in Indonesia.

METHODS

A qualitative research design was used for this study to understand the usage and impacts of manipulative instructional media in EYL classrooms. The qualitative method was chosen for its ability to provide rich, detailed descriptions and insights into complex phenomena, allowing the researcher to capture the nuances of teacher practices and student engagement in natural settings (Creswell, 2013). The study focused on SDN 1 Terong Tawah, where four English teachers and their classrooms served as the primary subjects of observation. This setting provided a representative context to investigate the practical challenges and successes associated with the implementation of manipulative instructional media. This research was a case study in design, which was especially suitable for an in-depth investigation into certain educational practices within a bounded system (Yin, 2018). The design allowed the researcher to delve deep into the experiences and perspectives of both teachers and students, which provided a holistic understanding of the investigated phenomena. The research design combined several strategies for data collection, namely, classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, to achieve comprehensive data triangulation and enhance the validity of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Classroom observations were carried out to obtain first-hand contacts or interactions and instructional activities concerning hands-on media. The researcher used an observation guide to record specific teaching strategies that took place, the level of student engagement, and forms of instructional media. Observations were recorded over multiple sessions to ensure a representative and detailed account of classroom dynamics. This method provided direct insights into how teachers integrated hands-on media into their lessons and how students responded to these strategies (Fraenkel et al., 2019). In parallel, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students were also conducted to gather in-depth qualitative data on their perceptions and experiences with hands-on instructional media. For students, it was about the effectiveness and engagement level of such media, while these interviews probed teachers' motivation, challenges, and approaches concerning the use of such media. Although they maintained a constant focus on the research questions, semi-structured interviews allowed the exploration of emerging issues. Using thorough analysis for accuracy and depth in the interpretation of data, the audio-recorded interviews were then transcribed for thematic analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Document analysis supplemented the observations and interviews by adding more context and evidence of instructional practices. The researcher examined lesson plans, teaching materials, and school records for insight into how the planning and implementation of manipulative instructional media were conducted. These documents revealed how teachers conceptualized and prepared their lessons and how well theoretical principles aligned with practical application. Document analysis also served to identify possible gaps in resource availability and usage (Bowen, 2009).

Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to identify, analyze, and interpret the patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes were first assigned manually and then categorized into themes that captured the research goals. For example, "teacher challenges," "student engagement," and "resource availability" were identified through the process. Thematic analysis was an iterative process entailing the refinement of findings and the ability to provide new insights. These included member checking, triangulation, and thick description to enhance the reliability and credibility of the findings. Member checking involved sharing preliminary findings with participants so that any misunderstandings in the interpretations were cross-checked for accuracy. Triangulation integrated data from multiple sources in this research study: observations, interviews, and documents, to cross-check information. Thick description allowed detailed contextual accounts that helped readers understand the context in which the study was conducted and generalize findings to similar contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This research method provided a robust framework for exploring the integration of hands-on instructional media in EYL classrooms. The combination of qualitative tools with rigorous

techniques for analysis yielded actionable insights to inform educational practices and policies. The multi-method approach guaranteed completeness in understanding the research problem and contributed to the greater discourse on innovative teaching methods for young learners.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings of this research showed the dynamic interplay between the use of hands-on instructional media and student engagement in EYL classrooms. Teachers adapted their instructional strategies over time, shifting from elaborate teaching aids to simpler, cost-effective methods that fit their time and resource constraints. One of the teachers, Teacher-2, reflected on her earlier experiences this way: "In the past, I used to make teaching aids like the model of a tree to explain the parts of a tree or parts of the body in English. But those aids seemed to be misplaced as I had left them in the classroom, and the students played with them." This statement depicted the practical difficulties of maintaining physical teaching aids in a dynamic classroom setting. Without developing elaborate aids, the teachers relied on approaches like word matching and word search activities. These approaches served as an enjoyable learning experience for the learners and saved preparation time too. Teacher-2 elaborated on the current practice, "We printed the vocabulary in English along with their meanings, cut them into pieces, and then asked the students to take turns matching each word." This step showed how simple manipulative activities also attracted the attention of the students and involved them in collaborative learning. The preference for simple methods was also reflected in the words of Teacher-3, who often used the word search activity.

"I usually used the word search method, but the material was different," she explained. Sharing of ideas amongst the teachers was also an important factor in adjusting appropriate teaching methodology. In the words of Teacher-3, "Sharing ideas with colleagues helped us find efficient ways to teach English to young learners." This way, the teachers developed a commensal approach in which they polished their teaching skills. It involved innovative and efficient lesson delivery strategies by the teachers, who, through a platform where ideas were shared freely, eased the challenges related to the inadequacy of resources. Observations showed that teaching with the help of instructional media involving students in practice raised their motivation. Teacher-2 described the interactive nature of lessons: "Teaching became more active because it could be described as learning while playing. As we knew, elementary students needed to be made happy first before they were willing to learn." This insight underlined the importance of creating an enjoyable learning environment to maximize student participation and outcomes. Teachers noted that when students were actively engaged through hands-on media, they demonstrated greater enthusiasm for learning and were more likely to participate in classroom activities. This finding coincided with the constructivist theories of learning, emphasizing interaction and engagement in knowledge construction. Similarly, Teacher-3 observed noticeable improvements in student motivation and academic performance: "The students became more active, and their learning outcomes improved. The hands-on approaches allowed them to observe and pay greater attention to lesson contents." These results indicated that this type of method achieved the twin advantage of enhancing students' cognitive as well as affective participation in their classwork. Greater motivation enhanced not only better academic achievements but also promoted positive attitudes towards learning and formed a very healthy ground for lifelong education. Teachers also observed that these methods encouraged collaboration and teamwork among learners since most of the activities were group-based and required them to assist one another. One of the challenges that teachers continually experienced included tolerating increased noise levels, which always accompanied practical activities.

Teacher-1 said, "Sometimes students focused more on playing rather than paying attention to the lesson." On one hand, the learning outcomes improved, while on the other, the class was very noisy, interfering with other classes. This brought into perspective how strategies that balanced engagement and discipline were necessary to ensure activities were kept productive and focused. In light of these challenges, structured guidelines were put in place for hands-on activities by teachers to ensure students remained focused while handling the

materials. It was also observed that clear rules and expectations helped in managing classroom dynamics effectively. With these challenges, the teachers developed certain best practices related to integrating manipulative instructional media.

For instance, elaborating on simplicity, as shared by Teacher-2, "Compared to creating teaching aids, it was more time-effective to engage with word matching or word search methods that were equally effective." This pragmatic approach helped teachers gain valuable use of their time when the students were fully engaged. Structured activities and clear guidelines also helped in effectively managing classroom dynamics. For instance, teachers assigned specific roles to students during activities to ensure that all of them stayed involved and avoided distractions. Such structured approaches offered guidelines on how to balance the interactive and learning aspects of hands-on learning. Collaboration among teachers was also instrumental in overcoming barriers to implementation.

As indicated by Teacher-3, the role of peer support was very prominent: "Usually, we shared ideas with other teachers, so the methods we used were often the same." That meant educators learned from one another and took those approaches that turned out to be effective in other similar contexts. Such stimulation of professional growth and collaborative learning among teachers contributed even more to implementing innovative teaching. Professional learning communities were also identified as strong forums that were extremely helpful in resource sharing, best practice, and creating a culture of continuous improvement. The findings revealed that while practical instructional media were good at enhancing students' engagement and learning outcomes, their introductions required proper planning and support.

The teachers interviewed said that for the methods to bring out their skills effectively, accessible resources and professional development were needed. Insofar as these needs were met, the gap between potential and practice could be bridged to fully avail of hands-on instructional media. These findings brought to the fore the role of systemic support for innovative teaching practices. Schools and educational authorities must make the resources available to train teachers on competency development. In addition, observations and interviews revealed the need for further differentiation in hands-on activities. Teachers who customized their approach to fit the tastes and learning styles of their students were more likely to say their pupils were more involved and content. This method of instruction conformed to present educational patterns, in which student-centered learning took the front stage.

Feedback from the students helped the teachers refine their methodologies, hence coming up with the best learning activities. From these findings, the use of instructional media in hands-on activities in EYL classrooms at SDN 1 Terong Tawah held immense promise for greater enhancement of learners' engagement and achievement. Simplifying instructional methodology, facilitating cooperation among teachers, and dealing with problematic situations arising due to classroom management, the teachers were able to facilitate exciting and interactive lessons. These findings provided valuable insights into how to improve the provision of English language education for young learners in Indonesia. Further research might investigate the long-term effects of hands-on methods on academic performance and their scalability across different educational contexts, thereby contributing further to the discourse on innovative teaching practices.

Discussion

The findings of this study strongly support constructivist and sociocultural theories, which prove that hands-on instructional media are effective in creating interactive and learner-centered environments. Constructivist principles emphasize that the learner constructs their understanding by active engagement and interaction with their environment, as clearly shown in the use of hands-on media in this study. These methods allowed for the concrete presentation of an abstract concept, enabling the developmental needs of young learners, as theorized by Piaget (cited in Jun, 2024) and Vygotsky (1978), to be met. These, for example, are consistent with Piaget's emphasis on the role of concrete operational stages in promoting meaningful learning experiences and Vygotsky's scaffolding techniques in support of cognitive development. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of social interaction and scaffolding in learning. The findings reported in this study do support this perspective, especially in collaborative activities facilitated by hands-on instructional media. Teachers observed that

students were more engaged when working together on tasks such as word matching and role-playing, which aligns with the theory's emphasis on the role of social context in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). These findings certainly strengthen the call for learning environments to be designed to exploit peer interaction as a resource to advance understanding and skill development, as discussed by Van de Pol et al. (2019) in relation to the importance of interaction and scaffolding within educational settings. Although the results are encouraging, the issues identified within this study indicate shortfalls in systemic support, notably within the training of teachers and the provision of resources.

According to Schunk (2012) and Hattie & Yates (2013), constructivist and sociocultural theories advocate for theoretically sound instructional frameworks that realize the fullest potential of these perspectives. The lack of adequate resources and professional development opportunities for teachers, as indicated in the findings, limits the sustainable implementation of hands-on media. In fact, it is about time that educational stakeholders were put to serious tasks in aligning practice with theory. This is reinforced by Gardner (2017) on systemic support needed to actualize unique approaches to learning. The data also reveal the practical implications regarding classroom management, which is another crucial area through which the effectiveness of manipulative instruction media is hedged.

Structured activities with clear guidelines were deduced as strategies necessary for sustaining the balance between engagement and discipline. This aligns with the theoretical emphasis on scaffolding, where teachers provide structured support to guide students toward independent learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Jun, 2024). The development of such strategies not only addresses classroom dynamics but also enhances the overall learning experience for young learners. Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) insights on structured learning environments support the findings on the necessity of balance between engagement and discipline. Other alignment of hands-on instructional media and constructivist principles is evident in how these techniques cater to a myriad of learning styles. Hands-on media give students the chance to study the lesson through multisensory means that best fit their personal taste and ability. This assures theoretical support that appropriate learning will occur when instructional techniques meet the unique learning needs of the learner, according to Clements and Sarama (2014). This, in return, helps to cultivate inclusivity and equity in education, given the varying cognitive and emotional needs of learners. In the area of policy and curriculum design, too, there are practical implications based on these findings.

It also establishes the need for professional development workshops to train teachers on acquiring skills in the design and conduct of appropriate hands-on activities. There is also a need for the formulation of affordable and accessible teaching aids so that practical teaching methods become sustainable for most educational settings. These interventions address the call by sociocultural theory for tools and resources to scaffold learning (Bowen, 2009; Van de Pol et al., 2019). This would also contribute to the higher-order aims of teacher professionalization and instructional improvement. While the findings support the theoretical underpinning of constructivist and sociocultural approaches, they also illustrate areas where such theories need to be contextualized in order to meet practical realities. For example, the noise levels and disruptions associated with hands-on activities challenge the idealized seamless interactive learning environment. This emphasizes adaptive strategies that balance theoretical ideals against the practical realities of classroom implementation. The need for such adaptive approaches has been addressed in Braun and Clarke's work (2006) on bridging theoretical frameworks with empirical realities. The study's results also confirm the teacher's dual role as facilitator and manager in the classroom. Constructivist theory positions the teacher as a guide who helps students build knowledge while sociocultural theory positions the teacher as a mediator in social interaction. Such an effort not only serves to bridge theory with practice but is also part of the larger commitment toward inclusive and participatory educational learning for young learners.

CONCLUSION

1. In the EYL classrooms of SDN 1 Terong Tawah, the teachers combined manipulative instructional media through simplification and interaction, such as word matching, word

search activities, and role-playing. These methods were adapted to young learners' needs and usually were easy and inexpensive to prepare; it takes little time to get ready. The teachers prepare activities that balance engagement with ease of preparation and try to be active learning, constructivist in principle, guided by the sociocultural theory that believes in collaboration and scaffolding.

2. Manipulative instructional media significantly affect the students' participation in moving the motivational level, and performances of the students are also increased. Students show greater interest in and are more involved in lessons for which manipulative and hands-on learning materials are available. It also allows for teamwork and collaboration easily. These findings confirm the theoretical positions that stress meaningful, multisensory learning processes which take into consideration different learning styles.
3. Teachers have to put up with a lack of resources, inadequate training, and problems in classroom management-such as noise and distractions. Such challenges require systemic support in the form of professional development programs, accessible teaching aids, and strategies for maintaining classroom discipline. The effective integration of manipulative instructional media will be sustainable by way of structured activities, teacher collaboration, and policy implementation that reflects realistic needs of the classroom. This will go a long way toward enhancing the quality of EYL education.

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