

Challenges and Teaching Strategies in English Language Teaching for Young Learners: A Descriptive Qualitative Study

Febria Sakinah^{1*}, Wapuja Jayati Gathy Nst¹, Meliana Okvianti¹, Silvi Ramadhani¹, Risma Nurhasanah¹

¹UIN Suska Riau, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: sakinahfebria@gmail.com, wpjathynst@gmail.com, melianaokv@gmail.com, silvi.ramadhani2710@gmail.com, nurhasanahrisma029@gmail.com

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Abstract: English language learning for young learners has become increasingly important in the era of globalization, as early exposure to a foreign language can significantly improve children's linguistic competence and cognitive development. However, teaching English to young learners requires appropriate strategies due to their developmental characteristics and learning needs. This study aims to explore the challenges and teaching strategies in English language learning for young learners using a descriptive qualitative approach through a literature review method. The data were collected from various relevant journal articles, books, and academic sources, and analyzed using content analysis techniques to ensure the validity and comprehensiveness of the findings. The results show that English teaching for young learners faces several challenges, such as limited instructional time, insufficient learning facilities, large class sizes, low student motivation, and limited teacher competence in designing age-appropriate learning activities. These challenges are closely related to the learners' characteristics, such as short attention spans, high imagination, and active learning behavior. To address these challenges, various interactive teaching strategies are recommended, including game-based learning, digital storytelling, songs, stories, and physical activities. These strategies have been proven to increase students' motivation, participation, and language proficiency. In conclusion, the integration of learner characteristics, teaching challenges, and appropriate instructional strategies is essential to create effective English language learning for young learners. Teachers are encouraged to continuously adapt and innovate their teaching approaches to meet the diverse needs of learners in different educational contexts.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Learning Characteristics, Teaching Challenges, Teaching Strategies, Young Learners.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of English in the global era has led to the introduction of English at an early stage in elementary education, particularly for young learners. Teaching English from an early age is considered beneficial because children are in a critical period of language development, enabling them to master a new language more effectively. In many educational contexts, including in Indonesia, English is introduced at the elementary school level to equip students with basic language skills to meet future academic and professional needs (Kusmaryati, 2020). Additionally, young learners are believed to possess strong potential for language acquisition due to their cognitive flexibility and natural ability to mimic language.

However, teaching English to young learners is not an easy task, as they possess

unique characteristics that distinguish them from adult learners. Young learners tend to be active, imaginative, and easily distracted, and they learn more effectively through engaging and meaningful activities rather than traditional instruction. They prefer learning through play, interaction, and real-life experiences, which requires teachers to design teaching strategies appropriate for their developmental stage (Sari & Mahriyuni, 2023). Therefore, understanding the characteristics of young learners is crucial for creating an effective learning environment in English language instruction.

Although important, various challenges still exist in teaching English to young learners. Previous research has identified several issues, such as limited teaching time, a lack of facilities and teaching materials, oversized class sizes, as well as low student motivation and difficulties in learning vocabulary and pronunciation (Sudrajat,

2022). Additionally, teachers often face difficulties in managing active classrooms and selecting appropriate teaching methods to maintain student engagement. These challenges indicate that teaching English to young learners requires not only pedagogical knowledge but also effective classroom learning strategies.

To address these challenges, various teaching strategies have been proposed and implemented in previous studies, such as game-based learning and digital storytelling, which have been shown to enhance student motivation, participation, and language development. Game-based learning, for example, creates a fun and interactive learning environment that encourages students to actively use the language (Saputra, 2021). Similarly, digital storytelling allows learners to construct meaning through multimodal activities and collaborative learning (Lestariyana & Widodo, 2018). However, although many studies have addressed teaching strategies and challenges separately, research that comprehensively integrates these two aspects in the context of early childhood learners remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to explore the challenges and teaching strategies in English language instruction for early childhood learners through a descriptive qualitative approach based on a literature review.

METHOD

Research methodology is a scientific approach used to obtain data and analyze it in accordance with the objectives of the study. According to (Sugiyono, 2021) qualitative research is a method used to understand phenomena in depth through descriptive data in the form of words and documents, rather than numerical data. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using a library research method to examine the challenges and teaching strategies in English language learning for early childhood learners.

This research is conducted in 2026 using a literature-based approach; therefore, it is not carried out in a specific physical location. The study focuses on collecting and analyzing various written sources such as national and international journals, books, and scientific articles related to English language learning for young learners.

The data sources in this study consist of all scientific literature discussing English language

learning for early childhood learners. The sample includes selected journal articles and academic sources chosen purposively based on their relevance to the research focus, particularly those addressing learning challenges, teaching strategies, and learner characteristics. The selection of sources is based on relevance, credibility, and publication recency.

The research procedure is carried out through several stages: collecting relevant literature, selecting appropriate sources, reading and organizing the data, and classifying the information into specific themes. The collected data are then categorized into several groups, namely challenges in English language learning for young learners, learner characteristics, and teaching strategies used in the instructional process.

The data analysis technique used in this study is content analysis. The analysis is conducted through three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involves selecting important information from the literature, data display involves organizing findings into themes, and conclusion drawing is used to explain the relationship between challenges and teaching strategies in English language learning for early childhood learners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners

Teaching English to early childhood students presents various challenges that can affect the effectiveness of the learning process. One of the main issues identified in previous research is the limited availability of teaching resources, including a lack of instructional materials, facilities, and learning media. In many elementary schools, teachers are required to manage their classrooms with limited support, making it difficult to create engaging and meaningful learning experiences for students (Pramesty et al., 2022). Additionally, the lack of appropriate teaching materials often leads to the use of traditional and less interactive teaching methods, which may not align with the characteristics of young learners.

Another significant challenge relates to classroom conditions, particularly large class sizes and limited instructional time. Managing a large number of students in a single classroom

can reduce teaching effectiveness, as teachers may struggle to provide individual attention and maintain classroom discipline. This situation becomes more complex when dealing with young learners, who tend to be active and require more attention and guidance during the learning process (Pertiwi et al., 2022). Furthermore, the limited time allocated for English lessons restricts teachers from implementing varied and interactive teaching strategies that could enhance student engagement and understanding.

In addition, the learning difficulties experienced by students also pose a challenge in teaching English to young learners. Many students struggle to master basic language components such as vocabulary and pronunciation, which are crucial for language skill development. Vocabulary, as a fundamental element of language learning, plays a vital role in enabling students to communicate effectively; however, young learners often struggle to remember and use new vocabulary due to limited exposure and practice opportunities (Tiing et al., 2021). Furthermore, low motivation and a lack of interest in learning English among students further hinder the learning process, especially when teaching methods do not align with their needs and preferences.

These challenges are also closely related to the characteristics of young learners themselves. As noted in previous studies, young learners are naturally active, imaginative, and easily distracted, making classroom management more challenging for teachers. They prefer learning through games and interactive activities rather than conventional instruction (Khulel & Wibowo, 2021). Therefore, when teaching strategies do not align with these characteristics, students may lose interest and become less engaged in the learning process. Overall, these findings indicate that the challenges of teaching English to young learners are multifaceted, involving not only external factors such as resources and classroom conditions but also internal factors related to students' characteristics and learning needs.

Characteristics of Young Learner in English Language Learning

Understanding the characteristics of early childhood learners is crucial for determining appropriate teaching strategies in English language learning. Early childhood learners differ significantly from adult learners in terms

of cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. They are generally active, imaginative, and curious, and tend to learn more effectively through concrete experiences rather than abstract concepts. At an early age, children are still in a stage of cognitive development where they rely on real objects, visuals, and real-life contexts to understand new information (Aslamiah, 2022). This indicates that teaching approaches for early childhood learners must be tailored to their developmental level to ensure effective learning.

In addition, young learners naturally tend to enjoy games and interactive activities. Learning through games, songs, storytelling, and movement is more effective for them than traditional teaching methods. This is because play is an integral part of children's learning process and contributes to their motivation and engagement in the classroom. As emphasized in previous research, early childhood students prefer enjoyable and meaningful activities, which can help them stay focused and engaged during the learning process (Prayatni, 2019). Therefore, incorporating fun and interactive elements into instruction is crucial for maintaining students' attention and participation.

Additionally, young learners have a relatively short attention span and easily lose interest if learning activities are not engaging. This characteristic poses a challenge for teachers in maintaining concentration in the classroom and ensuring the achievement of learning objectives. Teachers need to design varied and dynamic activities to prevent boredom and keep students actively engaged in lessons. Furthermore, young students are often more enthusiastic and willing to participate, but they also require clear guidance and structured activities to support their learning process (Kusmaryati, 2020).

Another key characteristic of young learners is their ability to learn language through social interaction and collaboration. They tend to learn better when interacting with peers and participating in group activities. Through interaction, they can not only develop language skills but also build confidence in using the language. Furthermore, young learners often learn by imitating others and experimenting with language use, which highlights the importance of providing a supportive and communicative learning environment. Therefore, teachers must create opportunities for students to interact and practice English in meaningful contexts.

Overall, these characteristics indicate that early childhood learners require an interactive, engaging, and developmentally appropriate learning approach. Understanding these characteristics is crucial as they form the foundation for selecting effective learning strategies. Without considering these aspects, teaching practices may not align with students' needs, potentially leading to low levels of engagement and less effective learning outcomes.

Teaching Strategies in English Language Teaching for Young Learners

To address the various challenges in teaching English to young learners, appropriate and effective teaching strategies are essential. Given the characteristics of young learners, teaching strategies must be interactive, engaging, and aligned with their developmental needs. One of the most widely used strategies in teaching English to young learners is game-based learning. This approach has been proven to enhance students' motivation, participation, and overall engagement in the learning process. Games create a fun and relaxed learning environment where students are encouraged to actively use the language without feeling pressured. Additionally, game-based learning helps students develop vocabulary and communication skills in a more meaningful and enjoyable way (Wulandari et al., 2020).

Another effective strategy is the use of digital storytelling, which integrates technology into language learning. Digital storytelling allows students to create and share stories using multimedia elements such as images, sound, and text. This strategy not only enhances students' language skills but also fosters creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking. Through this approach, students are actively engaged in the learning process as they construct meaning and express their ideas using English. Additionally, digital storytelling provides students with opportunities to practice integrated language skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Lestari et al., 2019).

Furthermore, communicative and activity-based approaches are also considered effective in teaching young learners. Methods such as singing, storytelling, role-playing, and physical activities can help students learn English in natural and meaningful contexts. These strategies support students' language development by

allowing them to use English in real-life situations, rather than merely memorizing isolated language forms. Furthermore, incorporating physical activities and interactive tasks can help maintain students' attention and reduce boredom during the learning process.

In addition, effective teaching strategies must also take into account students' learning strategies and preferences. As emphasized in previous studies, young learners tend to use a variety of learning strategies such as metacognitive, social, and cognitive strategies to support their learning process. Teachers can facilitate these strategies by providing students with opportunities to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning, as well as engage in collaborative activities with their peers. By aligning teaching strategies with students' learning strategies, teachers can enhance the effectiveness of student learning and foster more independent learning.

Overall, the implementation of appropriate teaching strategies plays a crucial role in addressing the challenges of teaching English to young learners. Strategies that are interactive, technology-integrated, and student-centered can significantly improve students' motivation, engagement, and language development. Therefore, teachers are required to be creative and flexible in selecting and implementing teaching strategies that align with the needs and characteristics of young learners.

Interating Challenges, Characteristics, and Teaching Strategies

The findings from the previous sections indicate that teaching English to early childhood learners involves a complex interplay between various challenges, learner characteristics, and the teaching strategies implemented in the classroom. The challenges faced by teachers, such as limited resources, large class sizes, and low student motivation, are closely related to the unique characteristics of early childhood learners, who require an engaging and interactive learning environment. If these characteristics are not taken into account, the learning process becomes less effective and can lead to low student participation and poor learning outcomes (Senthamarai, 2018).

Furthermore, the characteristics of early childhood learners such as their tendency to play, interact, and engage in concrete learning highlight the importance of selecting appropriate teaching strategies. Traditional teaching methods

that focus on memorization and passive learning are often unsuitable for early childhood learners, as they do not align with their developmental needs. Conversely, strategies such as game-based learning and digital storytelling provide opportunities for students to actively engage in the learning process and construct meaning in a more meaningful way (Contu, 2019).

Furthermore, the use of appropriate teaching strategies can also help address students' learning difficulties, particularly in vocabulary acquisition and language use. Since vocabulary is a fundamental component of language learning, effective strategies that encourage active learning and repeated exposure are crucial for supporting students' language development. By integrating interactive activities and student-centered approaches, teachers can create a supportive learning environment that encourages students to participate and practice the language with greater confidence.

In addition, integrating teaching strategies with students' characteristics also helps boost their motivation and engagement. When students are engaged in enjoyable and meaningful activities, they tend to develop a positive attitude toward learning English. This is particularly important for early-age learners, as their motivation plays a crucial role in sustaining their learning process. Therefore, teachers need to be flexible and adaptive in designing learning activities that not only address classroom challenges but also accommodate students' needs and preferences (Sari, 2023)

Overall, this study emphasizes that effective English language instruction for early learners cannot rely on a single aspect alone. Rather, it requires a balanced integration of an understanding of learner characteristics, the identification of classroom challenges, and the application of appropriate teaching strategies. This integration is essential for creating an effective, engaging, and meaningful learning environment for early learners.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the challenges and teaching strategies in English language learning for early childhood learners through a descriptive qualitative approach based on a literature review. The findings indicate that teaching English to early childhood learners is a complex process influenced by various factors, including

classroom conditions, resource limitations, and the learning difficulties experienced by students. These challenges are closely related to the unique characteristics of early childhood learners, who are active, imaginative, and require engaging and meaningful learning experiences. In response to these challenges, the implementation of appropriate teaching strategies plays a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of English language instruction. Strategies such as game-based learning, digital storytelling, and other interactive approaches have been proven to enhance students' motivation, participation, and language development. These strategies align with the characteristics of early childhood learners, so thus allowing them to learn in a more enjoyable and meaningful way. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of integrating challenges, student characteristics, and teaching strategies into the learning process. Teachers are required to be adaptive and creative in designing learning activities that meet students' needs while addressing the constraints present in the classroom. A balanced integration of these aspects can create a more effective and engaging learning environment for early-age learners. Therefore, it is recommended that English teachers, especially those teaching at the elementary school level, consider the characteristics of young students when selecting teaching strategies. Further research is also encouraged to explore this topic using an empirical approach to provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of teaching strategies in real classroom contexts.

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