

Implementing English Thematic-Integrated Learning for Children (Young Learners)

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Abstract

Introducing English from the basic level is very important. It should be exposed since a child in a very simple way, moreover English is placed as foreign language in Indonesia. English should be sounded in the early age from words to simple expressions deal with their daily life. Regarding this point, adjustment to the context in teaching English for children is necessary. Unfortunately, teachers still convey the material in a separated way. The materials given is mostly depended on the textbook of the school, and the way in delivering these is quite far from children' real life. It is not surprising when children have difficulties to use or speak English out of class or school because the delivery concept of the materials is far from their life. Therefore, it needs a new concept of teaching and learning English for children or young learners. Integrating the general knowledge or experience (topic) in the teaching and learning process will give a new atmosphere for them. This concept will also give more moral value which exists in society to children, so they do not only learn the material cognitively, but also affectively. Because the teaching and learning process has more values which support the character building of children.

Keywords: Teaching English, Thematic-Integrated Learning, Young learners.

1. Introduction

Children or young learners need to be exposed about English in the early age so they will be able to master it well next. Seeing the needs of English for children, schools still do not see this condition deeply. Many schools still deliver English in traditional or conventional way. Textbooks are as the main media for the whole teaching process of English so students have less or even no space to activate their creativity in learning the language. Brady (2003) describes the problems of traditional schools as, "stuck on a performance plateau. Even the best of them fail to hook solidly into students' natural curiosity, natural need to know, natural desire to make more sense of the world and their place in it". They are difficult to connect the language they get from the class with their life since the learning process less related with their real life. Delivering the English separately from other subjects also makes the language seems a subject which is should be studied through its formulas (the tenses) like Biology, Physic, or Math. This makes English getting far from students' interest, understanding, and motivation to learn.

The schools which still use the conventional teaching and learning process or the teachers who still teach students based on textbook are failed to foster the connections among all aspects within curriculum such as purposes of teaching and learning, the courses or subjects, the values, and other aspects. This occurs because of the separate and independent courses or subjects taught in those kinds of schools. The condition of the school curriculum, a teacher-centered learning strategy for learning, and centering the learning around tests, are the major reasons those schools are difficult to reach their mission getting the qualified teaching and learning process, and finally getting the qualified students. Teaching the subjects separately or independently only will make students more difficult to learn, especially English because it is contrast with the philosophy of nature which all are interconnected, included subjects we learn (Kovalik, 2003).

The teaching of subjects at schools should be connected among others, especially English. In English teaching and learning process, all subjects must be connected to it in every topic or theme discussed and every activity conducted inside or outside of class. So, students will learn English integrated and it is holistic. They will not be harder to understand other subjects because once they learn English; they also learn other subjects through the content. This strategy will be much effective if it is applied to children or young learners. In their early age, children need to be introduced English holistic by inserting other subjects into the topic or theme they learn. English should be taught differently to young learners by compiling other subjects as the topic to be discussed or conducted in the class. It makes students have variant of materials in learning English, not only learning about its structure. Besides, they are motivated to learn English since they know that other subjects also can be learned from English and students have no boredom in learning English inside or outside of class.

As the strategy to expose students' motivation and understanding in learning English, especially English, thematic-integrated learning can be used by teachers who or schools which have difficulties in exposing English to the students and place English as the truly language for them to be used.

2. Review to Related Literature

2.1 Teaching English

English is not the most widely spoken language in the world in terms of the number of native speakers, is the most widespread language in the world. This probably does not indicate the importance of English, but English not only seen from the number of the speakers, in what English is used for also becomes other factors. English is the major language of news and information in the world. It is the language of business and government even in some countries where it is a minority language. It is the language of maritime communication and international air traffic control, and it is used even for internal air traffic control in countries where it is not a native language. American popular culture--primarily movies and music--carries the English language throughout the world.

Teaching English becomes an important activity or profession since the world uses it as international communication. In some countries, English is the dominant language. It has that role in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland. All of these countries are former British colonies. In other countries, English is widely used, especially among people who have no other language in common, even though it is not the dominant language of the country. For example, English is widely used in Hong Kong, Singapore, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Malaysia. In such countries, it is often used as a means of communication between people who have different native languages. Seeing this condition, teaching English placed into two terms; TEFL (Teaching English as Foreign Language) and TESL (Teaching English as Second Language).

Cook (2004) describes about TEFL and TESL in a brief way. Based on his idea, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) involves teaching adults and children whose first or main language is not English. This can be done in the UK or abroad and the students may be learning English for either business or leisure reasons. Countries which have had their own mother tongue and national language like Indonesia, Vietnam, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Dubai. Teaching English as an Additional Language (TEAL) is also a widely used term and often means the same thing as TEFL. It's sometimes specifically used to refer to teaching English to people who are living in the UK but who do not speak English as a first language. These students are most commonly refugees and immigrants and need to learn the language in order to help them settle into UK society. Their courses are often government funded. Teaching English as a second language (TESL) or Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) may also be terms that are used but they generally all refer to the same thing - teaching English to someone whose native language is not English. ESL is used in countries such as US, Canada, and Australia.

Teaching English in Indonesia has important position and role since Indonesia being the part of world community. Placing English as foreign language in Indonesia does not stop the efforts of educators; teachers, professors, learners to keep learning, master, and be skillful in English. People have been aware that English now becomes as a part of life to face the higher competition in working, not only in national level but also international. It deals with some programs have been agreed by countries such as AEC (ASEAN Economic Community, AFTA (Asian Free Trade Area, and WFT (World Free Trade).

2.2 Thematic-Integrated learning

Thematic-Integrated learning is a way or strategy of learning that hooks objectives together and let the children see how things are related to one another. The more things make sense for them, adults and children alike, the more rapidly they learn and the better teachers commit learning to long-term memory. Thematic-Integrated learning combines two or more subject areas to create one course or cover an educational theme. Integrated learning is designed to increase student learning and retention of material. Integrated learning is also strategy for decreasing instruction in isolated academic disciplines because it combines goals and objectives from a range of academic areas (Beane, 1997). In thematic-integrated learning, teachers can combine disciplines by creating logical connections within their classrooms. Reisberg (272,1998) states "teachers using integrated learning may select a subject for instruction and include related topics from other areas in the unit plan". A teacher, or team of teachers, can combine subjects that have traditionally been taught separately into a single integrated course.

The idea of Thematic-integrated learning comes from idea of holistic education, the movement from traditional education-the separate way in delivering the subjects and independently to a holistic one that addresses all of the needs of all students. Some major factors, however, are agreed upon by all holistic experts. The components which are common to all forms of holistic educational philosophy are as follows:

1. the education of the whole child, mind, body, and spirit,
2. all things are interconnected and related and should be addressed as such in -22- the educational curriculum, and
3. the transformation of the way students think from fragmented thoughts and ideas to a connected, caring and self-aware whole.

The concept of thematic-integrated learning brings students to think critically and creatively in combining some disciplines into one teaching and learning process as a theme or lesson plan. It is in line with holistic education philosophy. Miller (1991, 7) in Cook (2004) argues holistic education does not focus on determining which facts or skills adults should teach children. But it is focused on creating a learning community which will stimulate the growing person's creative and inquisitive engagement with the world. Holistic education is not concerned with "Cultural literacy" ("what every American needs to know") so much as with nurturing healthy, while, curious persons who can learn whatever they need to know in any new context.

2.3 Young Learners

Young learners are different from adults in their way to learn a foreign language. They have their own characteristics, which are different from adults. The characteristics cover their ways of thinking, their attitude, their aptitude, et cetera. They also prevail to the children's ways of learning

language. This, of course, influences the ways of teaching them. To give the best quality of teaching English to the children, the teachers should know and understand them.

In this paper, discussing about young learners means children between five and ten or eleven years old (Scott and Ytreberg, 1990). Others define that young learners are those under 14 years old. Moreover, young learners are the children who study at Elementary level. In transmitting the language, children cannot decide for themselves what to learn. Most people argue the adult world and the child's world are not the same. Children do not always understand what adults are talking about and adults do not always understand what children are talking about. The difference is that adults usually find out something by asking questions but children don't always ask. They either pretend to understand or they understand in their own terms and do what they think you want them to do.

The characteristics of young learners:

- a. They can talk about what they are doing
- b. They can tell about what they have done or heard
- c. They can plan activities
- d. They are enthusiastic and positive about learning
- e. They love to play and learn best when they are enjoying themselves
- f. They can use logical reasoning
- g. They can use their vivid imagination
- h. They can use a wide range of intonation patterns in their mother tongue
- i. They have a very short attention and concentration span
- j. Their basic concepts are formed. They have very decided views of the world
- k. They can tell the difference between fact and fiction

3. English Thematic-Integrated Learning for Young Learners (The Result)

After implementing the thematic-integrated learning for children or young learners to one of elementary schools, it shows a significant result. The strategy is able to activate students' performance in the class, both orally and written. Students get variant materials because they are led to find topic from different subjects, and their motivation is raised up in learning English. They realize when they learn English, they also can learn other subjects as the theme or topic. However, teachers should be aware to some aspects deal with the classroom as the place for teaching and learning process. They are:

1. Safe classrooms, where everyone can take a risk (like giving an incorrect answer without being laughed at). Having in place everyday procedures, knowing that the schedule is predictable, and being consistent are all qualities of a safe environment. Life skills are practiced so that students interact appropriately and feel at home in their community classroom.
2. Using cooperative groups and developing collaboration among students leads to social problem solving and mutual respect. When children feel empowered to solve problems, what a sense of well being and independence they develop!
3. Students must have adequate time to process information and process information. This is not necessarily the quantity of time but also the quality of time given to exploring new concepts and helping children build on what they already know.
4. An enriched environment is key to a brain-friendly classroom. Hands-on activities, lots of resource books, and a clutter-free, purposeful immersion in learning provides children with loads of opportunities for expansion (and even incidental learning!).
5. Children in a brain-friendly classroom have choices in the ways they learn and express their learning. Individual learning styles, playing on strengths of the learners, using a wide range of strategies (from simple to complex) all make the tasks easier.
6. The content we teach must have an application to a child's real world – themes must be developmentally appropriate at each grade level so that students can make connections and form patterns in their minds.
7. We know that *un-learning* takes longer than *initial* learning, so we need to provide feedback all along, while mental patterns are being formed. This means careful guidance from adults and a conscious effort to monitor learning every day.

8. Finally, mastery of learning must be assessed in a variety of ways, not just paper-pencil testing. Student portfolios, retelling information, teacher observations, peer interactions – all are ways teachers can tell if students understood the learning.

4. Conclusion

The implementation of thematic-integrated learning in teaching English contributes students to learn more and differently. They are able to explore their proficiency not only in English but also other subjects. The sense of freedom and relax atmosphere much felt so they have more creativity in learning. Classroom management is aspect should be really aware of by the teachers to get a successful teaching and learning process for young learners.

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