

EFL TEACHER'S VIEW ON VIRTUAL BASED STORYTELLING IN TEACHING VOCABULARY FOR ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English to young learners (TEYL) is different from teaching adults. Children need constant attention and assistance as well as motivating methods to keep them engaged particularly during online learning in the pandemic era these days. This study aims to investigate English teacher's perception on teaching English vocabulary to elementary students' by using storytelling method in a virtual environment. The study asked the following question: What is the English teacher's perspective on teaching English using storytelling virtually during the pandemic? The study interviewed an English teacher of a private school in Bekasi, Indonesia using a semi-structured interview guide. The study found that the English teacher agreed that storytelling is beneficial to use in teaching English for young learners. In addition, the teacher mentioned that there were several issues during the online learning such as unenthusiastic students, students' limited access to the gadgets, and students' passive involvement during the learning. Further, in terms of teaching with storytelling, the teacher would request the students to make a video and retell stories in the textbook. This study concludes that it is paramount for English teachers to continuously provide varied teaching methods in order to solve problems faced by Indonesian elementary students during online learning.

KEYWORDS: *Elementary Students, Storytelling, Virtual Learning*

INTRODUCTION

In learning a second/foreign language, there are language aspects that must be mastered, namely, grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. Vocabulary is believed to be an essential part of developing a language. Nation (2001) explains that vocabulary knowledge and language are closely related, as vocabulary knowledge will enhance



learners' ability in using the language, and learners' ability to use the language will contribute to vocabulary knowledge. In addition, some research has reported that vocabulary knowledge has an influence on reading comprehension and more benefits the L2 (second language) young learners than the first language (L1) learners (Lervåg & Aukrust, 2010).

Introducing English to elementary students has several benefits for learners. In Indonesia, English has been introduced in elementary schools as a local content (Hornay, 2021) through the government's decree No. 060/U/1993 (Zein, 2017). The reason behind the decree is to prepare students as early as possible to be able to communicate in an international language. English is spoken as the second largest language in the world, and that means when students are fluent English speakers, they can be ready to face globalization and to be Indonesian representatives to introduce Indonesian local cultures to the world (Sutarsyah, 2017). Becoming fluent in English also means that students will have better future opportunities such as pursuing higher education abroad and having better career (Otilia, 2013).


However, teaching of English to young learners (TEYL) in Indonesia still has several issues. Firstly, English teachers in elementary schools are mostly graduated from English education departments that tend to focus more on teaching English to adults (Zacharias, 2010), and these teachers are called specialist teachers (Zein, 2017). Secondly, because of the shortage of specialist teachers, school administrators have to employ homeroom teachers who have no educational backgrounds in teaching English to teach English. Most of them are graduated from elementary school teacher education and, mostly, have limited English proficiency. Moreover, the English lesson in elementary schools is implemented as a local content, so the time allocation is very limited which makes it difficult for teachers to develop their students' language to reach the expected proficiency (Zein, 2017). However, these days, with the government's mandate to suspend face-to-face classes due to the Covid-19 pandemic, teaching English online to elementary students has become another challenge for elementary English teachers.

The government of Indonesia has instructed remote learning since March 2020 as recommended by World Health Organization (WHO) (Agung, Surtikanti, & Quinones, 2020). The remote learning requires teachers and students to conduct teaching and learning in front of their gadget screens from home. Schools and teachers need to prepare the online learning by using existing technology immediately. During this pandemic, online learning is considered to be an effective alternative so that teaching and learning activities can still run. However, the implementation of online learning requires more thorough preparation, such as online instructional strategies and

technology readiness (Rasmitadila et al., 2020), to ensure that the class is properly conducted so that students can understand the subjects delivered well and take part in the online learning process from home. Nevertheless, some issues also arise during online learning including students felt disconnected and demotivated to learn English and they wanted to have usual face-to-face learning (Rasmitadila et al., 2020).

Therefore, teaching English for young learners have to consider several factors before preparing the lessons and assignments through online platforms. Prior to the lesson preparation, Musthafa (2010) has mentioned that elementary English teachers must comprehend how children learn English as a foreign language. Since the English lesson in Indonesian elementary schools is taught as a local content and allocated with very limited contact hours, teachers are suggested to design a lesson that can provide learners with a rich-input environment in order to expose them with the language. Thus, vocabulary development should be the primary objective when teaching English for young learners so that we can help them develop their English proficiency. However, the reality shows that the Indonesia's ranking of English proficiency in the world according to Education First (EF) (2021) English Proficiency Index 2021 version which organizes English language proficiency tests in the world, Indonesia is in the 80th rank, which means that the English skills are still low. Therefore, it is paramount for teachers to teach English, in this particular English vocabulary, for children so that they will learn English early for their benefits.

In teaching English as a foreign language, storytelling is one of the learning media that can be used in the classroom. Storytelling is the delivery of a story that contains fun characters and includes moral values that can be applied by learners on a daily basis (Alkaaf, 2017). Using storytelling can increase students' enthusiasm for learning as well as reduce boredom in class. With the learners are being away from their teachers, storytelling might be very helpful to keep the learners focused and help them develop their vocabulary master. According to Trimastuti and Christinawati (2018), storytelling can be a useful method to develop students' vocabulary since stories are provided with many vocabulary input that learners can learn to develop their language proficiency. Besides developing student vocabulary, many studies learn that learning English to improve vocabulary for young learners and using storytelling techniques has great benefits, one of which is improving four language skills, better understanding story structure, and increasing awareness of culture and language in every story that children hear (Dyson, 1997; Morrow, 1986; Sneddon, 2008).



With the aforementioned data and explanation, this study aims to understand how elementary English teacher thinks about storytelling: the teacher's perspectives on teaching English to young learners using storytelling during the pandemic.

RESEARCH METHODS

This pilot study used a qualitative method. The respondent of the study was an English teacher of a private elementary school in Bekasi, Indonesia. The respondent was selected purposively as the school would be our sample study for research on the use of storytelling in teaching English vocabulary to young learners. This study interviewed the respondent using a semi-structured interview guide. The researchers conducted the one-on-one interview with the respondent through WhatsApp for a period of 45 minutes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

During this pandemic, teaching and learning are required to be conducted from home. There are various ways that can be done to support online learning so it can run smoothly such as, by giving assignments through application media, teaching via video, and delivering materials by making video calls with students. In this study, we wanted to investigate the teacher's perspective on the use of storytelling to teach English vocabulary through online platforms, i.e., Zoom.

We interviewed an English teacher to obtain necessary data about teaching English online with the use of storytelling for elementary school students during the pandemic. The results of the interview are as follow:

1) Storytelling is one of the best ways to teach English vocabulary

The teacher said that: *"For vocab, one of the best ways is to use storytelling, especially when students learn past activities, and daily activities. And many story books are provided in English."*

Based on the teacher's answers, storytelling is one way that can be applied to let students tell their activities, both past events and their daily activities. According to Langellier and Peterson (2004), when telling experiences or activities, we both add vocabulary and also expand communication skills. Therefore, when students are involved in making their daily stories, they will think of words that must be created and use their imagination in writing stories.

2) Reading storybooks and creating stories can help add students' vocabulary

The teacher stated that:

Storytelling it can help enhance student's vocabulary skills. Because by reading stories and making stories, when they do not understand, surely, they will ask for the meaning and look for the meaning of the word.

This response is in line with the statement of Ulanoff and Pucci (1999) that when students learn vocabulary in a foreign language from listening to stories, they will also train literacy skills. Still, listening to stories in a foreign language should be supported by the mother language so that students who are not yet fluent in a foreign language can truly understand the meanings of the words in the story.

Further, the study also revealed some findings regarding the challenges of the teacher toward online learning. The teacher's views are as follows:


1) Learning English online is not optimal

The teacher remarked that, "*Learning is not optimal because through online explanations the students do not understand, and many of them do not ask question*". The teacher's response conforms to the findings of the study by Mukhtar, Javed, Arooj, and Sethi (2020) which described the disadvantages of online learning, such as delivering material online was not optimal and the students was not as enthusiastic as during face-to-face learning. As such, this caused the teacher to be confused whether the students have understood the lesson or not.

2) Students get lack of access to gadgets

The teacher explained that many students still shared gadgets needed for online learning with their parents. Therefore, the students' parents would usually carry the gadgets with them when they leave for work, and the students would be unable to follow the learning and know about the assignments given by the teacher. The students would only do the assignments after their parents came home from work.

Nevertheless, to cope with the aforementioned challenges, the teacher mentioned some strategies he used during online learning. First, the teacher would explain the material first by providing learning videos and after that giving the exercises. If a student did not understand the lesson, he/she could chat the teacher directly for explanation. Then, the teacher would make a video call while the student was working on the assignment so that the teacher could monitor whether the student had



understood or not. In terms of storytelling, the teacher mentioned that he had ever used storytelling to teach English, *"Yes, I have. I asked to retell the story in their handbook."*

In this case, the teacher taught storytelling by retelling the story in the student handbook so that students could understand the lesson. According to Owocki (1999), retelling a story can help students rethink using their own words through text, therefore students can train their thinking in understanding a lesson. Retelling the stories also helps students to think conceptually and hone the information obtained such as vocabulary (Brown & Cambourne, 1987).

From the English teacher's interview, it can be understood that even though the teacher agreed with the benefits of storytelling, he rarely implemented storytelling in his teaching practice. When using storytelling, he would explain the story in the textbook to the learners and give them assignments afterwards. In the next meeting, the students were asked to retell the story to check their understanding. This practice was still oriented in the textbook in which the learners merely completed the assignments and were tested by retelling the story.

However, the reason why storytelling is beneficial to the language development is because there is an interaction between the teacher and the students. The teacher will ask several questions so that the students will predict the answer. Unfortunately, there was no interaction involved in the way the teacher told the story. This might happen because of the teacher's lack of information on instructional resources intended for younger learners. According to Butler (2019), reports on vocabulary teaching to young learners are still limited and have been oriented towards teaching English to adult learners. Therefore, it is suggested that future research may apply storytelling to teach English vocabulary through online settings to add insights into the benefits of storytelling in TEYL.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the interview, the study concludes that that the teacher agrees that storytelling is beneficial in teaching English vocabulary for elementary students although there are some challenges in online learning. However, teaching English with storytelling should be applied properly so that young learners can be interested and motivated in learning English. It is important for young learners to feel enthusiastic in learning a foreign language so that they can understand the target vocabulary. Therefore, it is hoped that they will be able to use the English language and increase their English language knowledge. Also, it is paramount for English teachers to

continuously provide varied teaching methods in order to solve problems faced by Indonesian elementary students during online learning

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