**Teachers’ Perceptions and Challenges: A Case Study at**

**An English Course for Young Learners**

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**ABSTRACT**

Teaching English to young learners comes with a significant challenge. Many teachers, particularly in non-formal education settings such as English courses, may not possess necessary qualifications. As a result, they may encounter difficulties in teaching.

This research is aimed to investigate the perceptions of teachers and challenges they face when teaching English to young learners. The study involved two English teachers at CEC English course in Bandung. The research design employed a mixed-method approach with a qualitative emphasis, through interviews and observations. The data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative methods. The findings revealed that the teachers held highly positive perceptions about teaching English to young learners. However, the interview results highlighted the main problems faced by the teachers, including difficulties in teaching pronunciation and managing a classroom. It was also revealed that both teachers have a lack of knowledge in English for young learners pedagogy.

 In the future, it is highly recommended that teachers acquire a comprehensive set of competencies essential for thre Teaching English for Young Learners program. These competencies should encompass a deep understanding of language development in young learners, effective classroom management strategies, proficiency in using age-appropriate teaching materials and techniques, and the ability to assess and cater to individual learning needs. By equipping teachers with these competencies, we can effectively address the multifaceted challenges they face in the classroom and significantly enhance the quality of English language teaching for young learners.

**Keywords**: english for young learners, teachers’ perceptions, pedagogy, english course

**INTRODUCTION**

It is worth noting that in Indonesia, the English language is considered a foreign language. Owing to the importance of English as a global language, parents in Indonesia tend to initiate their children into learning English from an early age. As a result, they enroll their children in English language courses to improve their skills.

Children who are proficient in English have a significant advantage in today’s globalized world. Not only does it open up more opportunities for higher education, but it also increases their chances of success in various fields. As such, parents are willing to go the extra mile to ensure that their children are well-equipped with the necessary English language skills to be successful in the future.

When parents select English courses for their children, they do so with the expectation that the courses will be taught by competent and skilled teachers. However, teaching young learners comes with its own set of challenges, and one of the primary challenges for teachers is to understand the characteristics of young learners. If teachers can comprehend how to teach young learners based on their unique characteristics, it can make the teaching process much more manageable.

It is also important to note that young learners possess unique traits that differentiate them from adolescents or adult learners. Young learners are more enthusiastic and receptive in the classroom. Children have a natural inclination towards acquiring a language, and therefore cannot be subjected to serious learning all the time.

Research suggests that young learners often struggle with the process of learning English as they tend to prioritize playing over serious learning. However, there are certain teaching methods that can be used to ensure that young learners are able to learn English effectively while also enjoying the process.

To achieve this, it is important to understand the characteristics of young learners. For instance, young learners have a short attention span and may lose interest quickly if the teaching method is too monotonous or lecture-based. Therefore, it is essential to use interactive and engaging teaching methods that cater to their interests and keep them motivated.

Additionally, it is important to create a positive learning environment that supports active participation and encourages young learners to express themselves in English. Using games, songs, and other fun activities can also be effective techniques to make learning enjoyable and help young learners retain information. Overall, teaching young learners requires a combination of effective teaching strategies, a positive learning environment, and a focus on making the process of learning English fun and engaging.

In an English course, teachers are equipped with all the necessary requirements to teach English. However, during the teaching process, teachers may encounter challenges and obstacles, especially when dealing with young learners’ classes that require additional motivation and skills.

In the meantime, teaching young learners can be quite challenging due to their boundless energy, short attention spans, and varying levels of comprehension. This makes it essential for educators to utilize creative and engaging teaching methods to effectively capture their attention and facilitate learning.

Furthermore, teaching young learners is an intricate and demanding endeavor. It requires educators to possess a deep understanding of child psychology and effective teaching methodologies specifically designed for young minds. Educators often encounter a myriad of challenges when instructing young learners, especially in the context of an English language course. In these situations, teachers must be able to foresee and skillfully navigate these obstacles to achieve success in imparting knowledge to young learners.

Several research studies have explored the perspectives of English teachers when it comes to teaching English to young learners. However, a notable limitation of existing research is the predominant focus on English teachers in formal educational settings, such as formal school institutions. This has resulted in a gap in knowledge, with insufficient exploration of the experiences and viewpoints of English course teachers who operate in non-formal educational environments. The need for further research in this area is evident in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the varying challenges and opportunities encountered by English teachers across different educational contexts.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research used a qualitative case study. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people construct meaning, that is, how they make sense of their world and their experiences in it. Qualitative research can be defined as a sort of research that focuses on elucidating and understanding real-world issues. The qualitative method will be used to examine how the specific circumstances in a society shape events, behaviors, and meanings (Maxwell, 1996). The data acquired in qualitative study comprises participants’ experiences, perceptions, and behavior. In line with that, this study examined the teachers’ challenges in teaching English and strategies applied by the teachers to overcome those challenges.

In order to conduct the research, the researcher used a case study as the design approach. This method involves analyzing and investigating a specific case or instance in depth, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying processes and factors at play. Using a case study approach can be particularly effective in providing insights into complex or unique situations, and can help to inform the development of strategies or interventions that are tailored to the specific needs of the case in question.

A qualitative case study, according to Merriam (1998), is an intense, holistic description and analysis of “a bounded system” or phenomenon. It is a form of ethnographic research study that focuses on a single unit, such as a person, a group, an organization, a program, a process, a social unit, and a policy. Creswell (1998) wrote that the bounded system could be bounded by time and place, and the case can be a program, an activity, or individuals (Mukminin & McMahon, 2013; Safitri et al., 2020). The purpose is to develop a thorough description and understanding of the “case”. Furthermore, a case-study analysis explores and emphasizes a current event in its real-life setting (Yin, 1994).

Case study methodology is guided by two key approaches, one provided by Stake (1995) and the other by Yin (1994). They both use a constructivist framework in their case study approaches. This framework claims that truth is relative and depends on one’s perspective. The advantage of this approach is that it allows the researcher and the participants to express their own tales (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Participants are able to convey their perceptions of reality through these stories, which allows the researcher to better comprehend the participants’ actions (Lather, 1992; Robottom & Hart, 1993; Slavin, 2011). Therefore, in this research, the case study design was selected as the appropriate research strategy to investigate the challenges face by the teachers in teaching English to young learners as well as the strategies use to overcome them.

This study was conducted in CEC English Course, Jl. Buah Dua No.1, Bandung. The study involved the participation of two experienced teachers who taught young learners aged 6-11. One teacher had 28 years of teaching experience, while the other had 21 years of experience. Only one of the teachers had a formal educational background in teaching. The observations for the study were carried out in two separate classes catering to young learners.

In collecting the data, questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations were implemented. The researcher also used a face-to-face interview with the teachers. The interview is a qualitative data gathering approach in which the researcher poses a sequence of planned but open-ended questions to participants.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS**

In this research study, the findings revolved around the teachers’ perceptions of the various challenges encountered in the process of teaching English to young learners, as well as strategies to overcome these challenges. The data was gathered through the employment of questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations.

Based on the questionnaires and interviews, it was discovered that the two teachers faced difficulties and challenges while teaching young learners aged 5 – 11 years. The obstacles encountered are that children have different levels of language skills in the same class, and they also have short attention spans and get bored easily.

One teacher also mentioned that the students seemed fatigued after a long day at school, which may have impacted their ability to focus during class. To address these issues, the teachers agreed that they needed to adapt to the students’ conditions.

In order to address the obstacles, the teachers employed a range of strategies. These included interactive games, incorporating music, integrating videos, and utilizing a wide array of resources available on the internet.

One of the teachers shared her thoughts on teaching English to young learners. She mentioned that despite her passion for teaching, she felt unsuitable for the task due to her age. Being in her 60s, she believed that she no longer had the creativity and patience required for the job, and intended to pass on her responsibilities to younger teachers soon.

 During the interviews, it was discovered that only one teacher had the necessary educational qualifications in teaching and held a valid teaching certificate. However, having a long time experience in teaching English, both teachers are competence in teaching but still face some difficulties and challenges.

Based on observations in the classrooms, it was noticed that teachers were more effective at managing students in smaller groups as opposed to larger classes. Specifically, classes with up to four students were easier to manage compared to classes with more than four students. In larger classes, the children appeared to be more energetic and less focused, which sometimes led to issues such as a lack of enthusiasm for learning and occasional conflicts.

**DISCUSSIONS**

The analysis revealed that the teachers dedicated their utmost efforts to instructing a classroom of young students. Both teachers displayed strong motivation and enthusiasm for teaching. They concurred that teaching young learners requires unique expertise and a great deal of patience.

Both teachers, despite their extensive teaching experience, acknowledged the need for further training in the specific area of teaching English to young learners. They expressed a desire to expand their knowledge of lesson planning tailored for this program. They also highlighted the importance of gaining a deeper understanding of pedagogy to enhance their effectiveness in teaching English to young learners.

Teaching English in an English course versus a formal school presents several notable differences. In a formal school setting, students are expected to strictly adhere to classroom instructions and guidelines. Conversely, in an English course, students often feel more liberated and believe they have more autonomy in their learning process.

Additionally, a significant distinction lies in the reason for enrollment. Many students attend English courses due to parental influence rather than their own will, potentially leading to a lack of intrinsic motivation. This lack of motivation can pose challenges for teachers as they strive to engage and inspire students in their language-learning journey.

**CONCLUSION**

The research findings indicate that the majority of teachers hold positive and supportive attitudes towards the instruction of English to young learners, even in the face of various challenges and obstacles. Although teaching English to young learners presents significant challenges, dedicated educators demonstrate a coordinated effort to overcome these challenges.

The requisite skills and pedagogical knowledge play a critical role in the effective delivery of instruction. Additionally, effective teaching demands a high level of motivation and an ongoing commitment to skill enhancement from teachers. By providing teachers with comprehensive and targeted training, we can ensure that the teaching and learning process is carried out with optimal effectiveness.

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