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Teaching and learning challenges faced by teachers and young learners in early literacy: reading and writing in EFL context

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ABSTRACT

This article aimed at identifying and investigating the teaching and learning strategies in early literacy which were used by the English teaching, obstacles faced by learners, and the solution in the teaching reading and writing for young learners especially in foreign language context. It was collected through peer review journals, theories, articles, books and finding from previous studies. Based on the researches and studies made on L1 and L2 acquisition, the learners who completed their first language acquisition have been found more successful in L2 and FL acquisition. The results of this article show that the teachers can integrate L1, L2 or Foreign Language in teaching reading, and also appropriate materials. Therefore, some strategies for early literacy for EFL learners are provided; teaching phonological awareness and making balancing between bottom-up and top-down processing skills.

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1. Introduction

Through reading and writing skills, the learners can develop their creativity and critical thinking skills with the variety of resources that the learners have it (Grabe & Zhang, 2013). Nevertheless, teaching and learning reading and writing is not an easy task. Developing reading and writing skills present many challenges for the teachers all over the world, the difficulties in teaching reading and writing skills have become major concern of our society (Antônio Da Silva & Pimentel, 2016; Asmari, 2013; Chen, Wang, & Luo, 2014; Daniels, Hamby, & Chen, 2015), not only the teachers but also for

the students even in their first language. Supported by Cammeron (2001) stated that in learning reading and writing is a complicated area even in the first language or the second language that the learners be warned in awareness of early literacy.

Several types of research shown that the study of early reading and writing for foreign language learning, especially for young learners, are often used as one of several key variables interacting the process of acquisition between First Language (L1) and Second Language (L2) or Foreign Language (FL) learning this phenomenon is such as milestones in the teaching and learning language. When the learners start to read and writing, the languages become permanent and there are fewer other clues to meaning. For instance, when the learners speak is often accompanied by other clues to interpret the meaning (expression, movement, gesture, etc.), thus it is different with reading and writing. Consequently, this is an extremely important area to be explorations and continuities in how young learners with difference individual, background, motivation, self-performance, etc., contribution to their development of their L2 or FL (Baker et al., 2011).

In spite of the statement from (Vanhove, 2013) on his research entitle the *critical period hypothesis in second language acquisition*, and (Birdsong, 2014), they were standpoint that 'the earlier the better'. In a way (Shin, 2006) believed that starting the study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) before the critical period where the range of their age is 12 or 13 years old will build more proficient speakers of English. Elaborated with (Brown, 2007:86) stated that young learners have a good deal of both cognitive and effective effort in order to internalize both native and second languages. Accordingly, such as mushrooms, many of schools around the world starting teach English in early age. In fact, this phenomenon is contradictory with the education system in Indonesia. The Ministry of Education and Culture has been going dramatic changes and dilemmatic over the past six years with the English subject in elementary schools. Government gives reason that elementary students should be focused on their first language (Indonesia), thus the young learners can preserve cultural heritage. On the other hand, it will also give a new polemic in the context of the cognitive development of young learners in learning a foreign language.

Essentially, there are some obstacles that face by both of the teachers and the learners in teaching learning reading and writing in foreign language context especially for young learners in Indonesia. For the reason, reading and writing require a certain degree of inner concentration such as the spelling of the written language is not the same as the pronunciation or speech (Brown, 2007; Dörnyei, 2013) the learners know the word, but does not know what it looks like to write down. It is necessarily the common barrier when the mother-tongue influence into the target language. Then, the learners might be able to read the text, in fact, they do not enough ability to understand it. Therefore, this challenge gives endeavors for the teachers in how they are integrated L1 and L2 or Foreign Language in the teaching reading and writing. Last, materials also pose a problem for many learners and teachers (Akbari, 2015). For instance, reading materials are easy to find from internet or books stores however not all of the reading materials have an equal genre, register, and written, or spoken that cause confusion for the learners.

As a result of this article aimed at identifying and investigating the teaching and learning strategies in early literacy which were used by the English teaching, obstacles faced by learners, and the solution in the teaching reading and writing for young learners especially in foreign language context.

2. Method

The method of this research is non-research articles. It is intended to gather the information on the 1) what strategies are used by the teacher to carry out successfully in teaching and learning early literacy for young learners in EFL context, 2) How can the teachers integrate L1, L2 or Foreign Language in teaching reading and writing for young learners, and 3) what materials are applicable to teaching reading and writing for young learners. This procedure is allowed as a literature review is any procedure to gather and describe the current status of population under study, include attitudes, options, and any necessary information from literature.

3. Results and Discussion

In discussions of this article were collected through peer review journals, theories, articles, books and finding from previous studies. In line with the questions of strategies are used by the teacher to carry out successfully in teaching and learning early literacy for young learners in EFL context, how the teachers can integrate L1, L2 or Foreign Language in teaching reading and writing for young learners, and appropriate materials for teaching reading and writing in EYL.

The discussion deals with the interpretation of the findings based on the relevant theories and previous findings.

The results are based on the statement of the problem which are presented in four main parts. The first part deals with teaching English for Young Learners (EYL) in foreign language context. The second part deals with early literacy strategies. The third part deals with integrate L1 and L2 or foreign language learning in reading and writing for young learners. The fourth part deals with reading and writing materials for young learners.

3.1 Teaching English for Young Learners (EYL) in Foreign Language Context

In recent years, the teachers of English as Foreign Language (EFL), or English as a Second language (ESL), have been paying increasing attention to categorizing the needs of their students towards learning English and the reasons for learning it. As an example in Indonesia where English is regarded as a foreign language and is largely treated as an academic subject in the school's system and is not widely used outside of the classroom. Thus the object of teaching English just refers to academic context.

For that reason, as the teachers stepping into the education system, it is important to inform the teachers of their students' need and attitudes towards learning English so that from the beginning the teachers can play an effective role in their classroom. In fact, to know the need of young learners it will be a hard task, dissimilar with adult learners who already know their need. In consequence, it needs some principles how to teach English to young learners in foreign language context.

To keep up with the issues of teaching young learners and seek effective ways in teaching, (Riley, 2000; Shin, 2006) on her journal article suggested to applied some strategies to teach young

learners. First, the teachers should give supplement activities with visuals, authentic, and movement because young learners can understand through hand, eyes, and ears. For instance, you might bring colored visuals, toys, puppets, or other subjects to match with your theme. Second, involved the learners in making visuals and realia are help them in engage the context of the lesson. Third, teach in themes, it is important for the teachers to have a variety of activities. It is a good choice to used thematic unit planning in teaching English because the learners can build a large of context to learning the language. Fourth, establish classroom routines in English, it means the teachers should build interaction in English since young learners can remember with repetition in certain of routines and activities. For instance to get students' attention the teachers say "Hello class" or another interaction. Last is collaborate with other teachers in your school, this makes the learners have rich experiences and connected to their real life.

3.2 Early Literacy Strategies

Composing reading and writing is hard work, even when the learners doing it in their own language. First, the learners should understand and get the ideas after reading it, then the learners have to express them in a way that really communicates with the readers. This is the goal of learning reading and writing. In any case, there are a number of different strategies to introduce of reading and writing in a foreign language.

According to (August & Shanahan, 2008; Mccutchen et al., 2002) an important part of reading ability is phonological processing. Based on experimental research conducted by Mccutchen et al., (2002) in the correlation between phonological awareness and orthographic fluency, the result showed that which all the variables correlated with one another. Globally, phonological processing abilities have an impact on reading acquisition and comprehension.

Although, (Scott, Wendy A, Ytreberg, n.d.) argue that phonemic can become extremely complicated, then they were suggested to teach learners who are not familiar with the Romance alphabet such as Japan, Korea, China, etc., or who do not have similarities between letters and sounds in their own written language. It will be a useful way of learning reading and writing. Therefore, (Scott, Wendy A, Ytreberg, n.d.) give alternative solution besides teaching phonological, that is "Look and Say" this approach usually start by teaching everyday worlds which are already familiar to the learners and this approach is based on words and phrases.

Early literacy in EFL context should be meaning, focused and balanced. It is not effective to focus on decoding the meaning of the full text, then making balancing between bottom-up and top-down processing skills is the best way for early literacy. For instance, when the teachers doing reading aloud or shared reading using a big book, such as *Three Pigs and Wolf*. First, the teachers can think out loud while previewing the cover of the book, pointing at and commenting on the picture of three pigs, wolf and etc., the teachers might ask related to each part of the picture "What is this?", "Where is the pig?" and have the learners identify the house, wolf, and three pigs. This is the most natural way in teaching early literacy for young learners.

3.3 Integrate L1 and L2 or Foreign Language Learning in Reading and Writing for Young Learners

In this issues of teaching and learning reading and writing for young learners, which consider how the teachers integrate L1 and L2 or foreign language in Indonesia, several journals are presented. Based on (Ioup, 2005) the subjects of her research were a bilingual school that used three languages; Catalan-Spanish and English. The result showed that the current system of formal education does not provide enough exposure to the learners in order for the early starter in learning a foreign language. It means that the earlier learners' start their learning in foreign language still had not caught up with the balance of L1, L2, or foreign language. This is contradictory with (Birdsong, 2014; Shin, 2006; Vanhove, 2013) who are standpoint that 'the earlier the better'. Therefore, the differences statement from researchers provides an overview for the teachers that can be the basis reasoned decisions in considering to integrate L1 and L2 or FL especially in teaching reading and writing, which is need extra treatment for young learner in learning the language.

Then, what can the teachers do in their teaching reading and writing for young learners and what the best decisions to integrate L1 and L2 or foreign language in Indonesia with the dynamic and polemic of the education system. Based on (Collier National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education., & United States, 1988; Sang, 2017) they were analyzes a number of factors for efficient and cost-effective ways to improve the learners' English skills such as the learner's cognitive style, socioeconomic background, formal schooling in the first language, and many others factors. The result of the previous research (Lucas & Schecter, 1992) also shown that individual characteristics, sociocultural factors influences in the L1 and L2 or Foreign Language learning. In sum up that factors influence the learners in learning languages, it depends on the learning situations, the learners' age and many other factors.

However, an area with few non-native speakers of English or with the students less communication in English, it is possible to teach reading and writing in English with resource to the L1 (Roberts, 1994). Based on research conducted by Janopoulos (2010), Ret et al., (2014) and Role et al., (2016) suggested that the teachers should teach the learners with naturally such as advertising, print media, labels, sounds, graphic symbols that the learners encounter daily and should be taught simultaneously. It means the teachers can help the students learning reading and writing with naturally. Supported by (Rigg, 1991; Wang, 2009) in L2 or Foreign Language can develop much as does L1, thus both of the teachers and learners should paying attention to doing with language rather than to language itself. Like L1 in L2 and FL, the teachers can develop natural interaction and used a variety of collaborative learning activities.

3.4 Reading and Writing materials for Young Learners

The materials covered should be related to the learner's professional interest and needs. This strategy also gives the teachers an opportunity to use materials acceptable in teaching young learners literacy, then the question is what the materials are acceptable for young learners in learning reading and writing. Some young learners develop gradually, thus there is the difference between young learners of six can do and what young learners of 11 can do.

Therefore, (Mallet, 1999; Sweet, 2000) there are three stages of age suggested helping the teachers in identifying the materials for young learners. Firstly, stage 1 (5-7 years old) the materials should be enjoyable and learning about finding out, it means our multicultural needs to be reflected in both fiction and non-fiction resources in the classroom and this will benefit for young learners, for instance, information about food, history, religions, customs across the world. They know more people outside of the classroom. Secondly, stage 2 (7-9 years old) making progress in satisfying and pleasurable context, is how the teachers can bring the learners in the lesson continues. Thus, the learners can enrich their observation and conclude based on the text of the book that they have been read, for instance reading *Encyclopedias*. Last, stage 3 (9-11 years old) meeting new challenges creatively, is provide a critical opportunity to help young learners build up the skill of being able to transform what they read (Brugar & Roberts, 2018). For instance, the teachers might give the learners about autobiographical and biographical reading and writing, this kind of reading can help the learners learning history and learning from the experience of other people.

Furthermore (Alomrani, 2014) recommend that EFL teachers should adopt textbooks or materials that provide step-by-step instruction regarding integrating reading and writing, for instance, language experience approach (Shin, 2000) this activity help both of the teacher and the learners in build reading and writing. First, the learners can share an experience that they can write about, such as reading a short story the learners can report who the characters are, where they live, and so on. Then the role of the teachers is facilitated the learner's discussion and writes their ideas into correctly formed. For the materials, the teachers should avoid using out-of-date EFL textbooks that treat reading and writing as separate skills.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

Reading and writing for young learners in the EFL context need to be explored, investigate, and developed in the education system especial in Indonesia's curriculum as they have implications for national reconstruction, integration, and progress. Therefore, the success of teaching and learning in early literacy for young learners in their second language or foreign language depends on many factors and there is available research suggests some strategies in early literacy for EFL learners, how the teachers can integrate L1 and L2 or FL in teaching reading and writing, and also applicable materials. Based on the researches and studies made on L2 and FL acquisition, the learners who completed their first language acquisition have been found more successful in L2 and FL acquisition. It means that very important for the teachers to know the ability of the students' first language before continue to L2 or FL learning.

Age of onset is the most important ones in language learning, it has been found that 'the earlier the better' but it also depends on the learning situations, the learners' age and many other factors. Therefore, some strategies in early literacy for EFL learners are provided; teaching phonological awareness and making balancing between bottom-up and top-down processing skills.

In integrating L1 and L2 or FL it is suggested that the teachers should teach the learners with naturally such as advertising, print media, labels, sounds, graphic symbols that the learners encounter daily and should be taught simultaneously. It means the teachers can help the learners learning reading and writing with naturally.

There are some aspects that need to be considered in choosing the materials for EYL in teaching reading and writing such as age, illustration, thematic units, motivated, and social interactive. Those aspects can help the teachers and the learners to become a better reader, writers, and thinkers when they were integrated reading and writing activities into their literacy instruction.

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