

A PORTRAIT OF EYL TEACHERS: Their Competence and Performance

*Maya Defianty and Nia Nafisah***

ABSTRACT

Brown (2001) asserts that competence and performance are two important factors EFL teachers need to conduct successful classroom instructions. A competent teacher facilitates learning well, while good performance is essential to model students to learn. In line with this claim, this paper aims to describe whether the EFL teachers in this study have met those requirements. This study employed qualitative method using descriptive analysis. The subjects are four EFL teachers from three elementary schools in eastern part of Bandung. The data were collected through observation, questionnaires, and interviews. The findings of the study showed that inappropriate education background and lack of training affected the success of teaching and learning process, especially in English for Young Learners (EYL) classrooms. Therefore, it is necessary that EFL teachers have proper educational background as well as adequate training in EYL teaching to qualify as competent teachers with better performance.

Background

As the trend of learning English at young age is getting popular, many elementary schools in Indonesia provide the subject to be taught to their students. This policy is supported by the decree of the Minister of Education and Culture number 060/U/1993 which has included English in the curriculum for the elementary level of education as one of the local content subjects from grade four to grade six (www.depdiknas.go.id). It seems that the government and the society are in agreement that youngsters should be

* Maya Defianty, M.Pd has taught at LBPP LIA Buah Batu Bandung since 2004 and is currently teaching EYL. She also teaches at Ibnu Khaldun University, Bogor.
Nia Nafisah is a lecturer at English Department in Indonesia University of Education (UPI) Bandung.

introduced to English so that they are able to communicate in this international language. However, has this goodwill been achieved satisfactorily in practice?

The impact of the trend of learning English at elementary school demands sufficient number of teachers. If a school requires one EYL teacher, how many will there be all over Indonesia? Unfortunately, in practice, it looks as if there are not enough EYL teachers. Many teachers who are assigned to teach English in elementary schools do not have English teaching background. They have various background, from (any) language program to any program. Some schools assign any available teacher at their schools, some assign any willing person who is interested in English, regardless his/her background.

On the other hand, since English is a foreign language in Indonesia, classroom could be the only place where learners can interact and internalized what they learn. Hence, teacher is a factor that contributes to the success of language learning. Consequently, teachers should have the knowledge of who children are and what they should do to facilitate children's learning.

Relating to the fact that only few EYL teachers have English teaching background, this situation raises a question on whether the existing EYL teachers are competent to teach young learners. Even if they can perform well, i.e. they can speak English, do they have adequate knowledge to understand the nature of young learners and to facilitate them to learn the language? Departing from this point, this study aims to describe how competent the EYL teachers are, more specifically those who teach EYL in three elementary schools in eastern Bandung.

Literary Review

Learning English at an early age is not the sole factor that would determine the success of language learning. Cook (1991) believes that interaction with the situation and the people also play an important role in language learning. Likewise, Musthafa (2003) asserts that young learners need sufficient exposure, support, engagement, teacher's confidence, capabilities and sponsorship to be successful learners. Nunan (2004) also puts forward the amount of time the kids are given and the competence of the teacher as some other factors to contribute the success of learning.

In addition, a competent teacher of EYL should bear in mind how young learners learn. Young learners of elementary school age, for instance, have short attention span, need physical movement, and are sensitive. Therefore, methods of teaching should accommodate these characteristics. For example, they should have short and varied activities, games and songs, as well as free feeling from anxiety (see Piaget, Krashen (1992), Brown (2001), Brewster (2002), and Klein (2005)). Meanwhile, in assessing young learners, it is important not to give score; instead, it is formative assessment that would give positive impact on children (Rixon, 2004).

Just like any other teachers, competent EYL teachers should also be able to formulate lesson plan that serves as guidelines in the objective they would like learners to achieve. Brown's (2001) format of lesson plan starts with goal and ends with extra-work class to ensure that learners have organized and attainable activities. Both Brown (2001) and Harmer (2001) agree that a lesson plan must consider the goal, objective, as well as sequence and time to fit the learners' nature of learning.

As a result, EYL teachers are required to understand the nature of young learners and what to do to facilitate their learning. Shamin (2004) elaborates it as having the knowledge of how children learn language, what intervention teacher can take to vary and enhance opportunity to learn English. These competences would enable teachers to conduct appropriate instruction for young learners (Hughes, 2004).

Unfortunately, studies on EYL teachers in Indonesia show that they are lack of the competence discussed above. Suharno (2005) finds that only few teachers comprehend the principles of teaching English to young learners. Chodijah (2004) expounds the existing teachers of EYL as follow:

1. Good English teachers with some knowledge on teaching English to young learners (very few)
2. Good English teachers who teach adults with limited knowledge on teaching English to children –shift from teaching adults to young learners.
3. Young learners teachers with quite good knowledge of English but have limited knowledge on how to teach English to young learners.
4. Experienced young learner teachers with low level of English (no knowledge of how to teach it).
5. Native speaker teachers.

Besides, according to Alwasilah (2004) there was no pre-service or in-service program to produce English teachers for elementary schools.

Research Methodology

Since this study aimed to describe and understand the nature of an event taking place in real life, it employed a qualitative method to conform what Lynch (1996) says that qualitative paradigm emphasizes on observing, describing, interpreting and understanding how events take place in the real world.

This study took place for two months in three elementary schools in eastern part of Bandung. These schools shared similar features to many other public elementary schools in Indonesia. They have a great number of students in each classroom with English teachers from various backgrounds.

The subjects of the study were four teachers who teach English in those schools. The first respondent graduated from Indonesia University of Education majoring *Tata Boga* in 2000. She has been teaching English in elementary school since 2005. The second respondent graduated from STBA-ABA Yapari majoring in English in 1992. She has taught English in various levels, such as elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school. The third respondent graduated from UIN Sunan Gunung Jati Bandung majoring in Arabic pedagogy. He has taught English for a year. The fourth respondent has been teaching in elementary school for one year. Besides teaching in elementary school, she is also a private teacher. She is still studying at Indonesia University of Education. None of these four respondents have ever participated in any seminars or workshops concerning teaching English to young learners.

The data were collected through observation, questionnaires, and interview. Then, the data were coded and classified to be followed up with the interpretation and analysis.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of how English instructions were carried out can be categorized as follow:

Items	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent3	Respondent4
Goal(s)	√	√	√	√
Objective	X	X	X	X
Materials and equipment	√	√	√	√
Procedures	X	X	X	√
Evaluation	√	√	√	√
Extra-Class Work	√	√	√	√

(table adapted from Brown (2001))

From the table above, we can conclude that every respondent has goal(s) when they conduct instruction. Nevertheless, they lack of objective in teaching. For example, when a respondent had a goal to introduce past tense, she explained the whole formula of past tense (S + V2 + O). However, from observation and interview, it was not clear what she wanted her students to achieve as the students did not really understand why they should know the formula and how to use it. Contrary to this fact, Bostwick (1995) argues that the success of teaching and learning process can be measured only if the teachers have clear teaching objective that they must achieve.

Instead of having teaching objectives, three respondents claimed that they depended on the textbook in deciding which materials to teach for each session. It was not surprising that they neglected the procedure of teaching young learners such as techniques, stages, and sequences of instruction. There was no adjustment in technique of teaching because they applied similar technique for every lesson.

Although respondent 4 also relied on textbook, she varied her techniques in giving instruction. For example, she gave songs and games –techniques which are appropriate for young learners (Brewster, 2001). The class, then, was less threatening and boring, as the children enjoyed the activities. It seems that her educational background, which is from English education, supported her performance and competence.

In terms of evaluation and extra-class work, all respondents were aware of the needs of assessment and homework. Nevertheless, what they did revealed that they were lack of understanding of how assessment should be carried out in young learner classroom. The evaluation conducted by the respondents can be categorized as traditional assessment, in other words, they relied on tests to measure their students' achievement. Instead of providing feedback to students' learning, the respondents allotted grades or scores for students homework.

Regarding performance, all respondents overused bahasa Indonesia during instructions. Translation then became prominent technique of instruction. Another thing that occurred was that all respondents, except for respondent 4, committed many grammatical mistakes. Therefore, students got neither much exposure nor model as the support of successful learning.

The findings show that there are specific requirements to be teachers of English to young learner. Interests in English and willingness to teach young learners are not enough to equip them to teach EYL. Those EYL teachers whose backgrounds are irrelevant tend to ignore how children learn and treat them accordingly. On the other hand, knowledge of pedagogy and the nature of young learners *do* matter in supporting the success of

learning. A teacher whose background is English education, more specifically EYL education, has likely to be more competent and perform better.

Consequently, this grim portrait of the existing EYL teachers urges the need of standard for EYL teachers in order to provide qualified teachers. At least, there should be more training and workshops to enable the existing teachers perform and understand better about English to young learners.

Conclusion

This study focused on describing whether the present EYL teachers have met the requirements to teach English to young learners in terms of competence and performance. Findings showed that three respondents were lack of competence and performance due to deficient knowledge of how to teach English to young learners. The fourth respondent, whose education background was relevant, seemed to have fair understanding of her subject but needed more experience to make a better teacher. Thus, we may conclude that proper educational background and training highly affects teacher in conducting instructions.

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