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ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE OF LEARNING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Abstrak: Pada era dimana teknologi dan informasi berkembang dengan sangat cepat dan pesat, peran bahasa Inggris menjadi salah satu kunci keberhasilan dalam menaklukkan dunia globalisasi ini. Bahasa Inggris pada kurikulum pendidikan nasional di Indonesia dipelajari dari tingkat sekolah dasar sampai perguruan tinggi. Pada tingkat sekolah dasar, bahasa Inggris diajarkan sebagai muatan lokal yang mana tidak diwajibkan untuk dipelajari. Dalam pelaksanaan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di Sekolah Dasar telah banyak mengalami perubahan dan penyesuaian terkait dengan perubahan kebijakan oleh pemerintah. Pengajaran bahasa Inggris sedari dini dapat mengoptimalkan penguasaan bahasa asing dengan pendekatan pembelajaran yang sesuai dengan perkembangan bahasa anak. Pengajaran bahasa Inggris ini juga disesuaikan dengan karakteristik anak – anak yang dapat memfasilitasi perkembangan kemampuan anak secara optimal terutama perkembangan bahasa anak. Gagasan dalam artikel ini berkaitan dengan pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris yang diberikan sejak sekolah dasar. Pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris penting diberikan sejak dini. Artikel ini berbicara tentang pentingnya bahasa Inggris dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di Sekolah Dasar.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa Inggris, Pembelajaran Bahasa, Sekolah Dasar

Abstract: In the era of technology and information are developed fastly and rapidly, the role of English is one of the keys to success conquering the world of globalization. English in Indonesia's national education curriculum is learned since elementary school to university level. At the primary school, English is taught as a local content which is not required to be studied. The implementation of English learning in primary schools has many changes and adjustments related to policy changes by the government. Teaching English on early age is able to optimize the mastery of foreign languages by using learning approach which is suitable with childrens' language development. English teaching presented also adapts the characteristics of children which can facilitate the optimum development of childrens' abilities. The ideas of this article relate to the teaching and learning English since elementary school. English teaching and learning is important to be given on early age. This article presents about the significance of English and learning English in primary school.

Keywords: English, language learning, primary school

INTRODUCTION

The development of the world in this era of globalization is very fast and rapid including in Indonesia. Free trade, the number of foreign companies, and competition between foreign workers and local workers will occur in Indonesia. This makes the role of English very important. Mastery and use of English as an international language becomes a must to be able to keep up with the times in this era of globalization.

English is a universal language that is widely used as the main language in some developed countries of the world. Many countries around the world make English the official language in inter-country meetings. Therefore, English has become an international language that is widely spoken in everyday life. English is not only used in communication, but it is also used as an introductory language in various fields of science and profession. Many of the latest science research books and journals are published in English. In addition, the profession that exists today also requires its users to be fluent in using English.

In Indonesia, English is a foreign language, but it is widely used in people's daily communication. This is obvious, where English is one of the lessons taught from elementary school to college. In fact, at junior high and high school level, English is one of the compulsory subjects in the National Examination. While for college and university, English is used as a general basic course which must be taken for university students (Warniati & Hanum, 2020).

Indonesia government describes the policy of the implementation of English as foreign languages which can be used as the language of instruction in education in order to support the foreign language ability of learners which is stated in Undang Undang Pendidikan Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional pasal 33 ayat 3. This foreign language is more focused on the use of English. The government used to make English as one of the lessons in elementary school through National Education Curriculum which is release in the 1994. Based on Permendiknas No. 22 Tahun 2006 (*Permendiknas, 2006*) and Permendiknas No. 23 tahun 2006 (*Permen, 2006*) related to Graduation Competency Standards, which say as English is one of the mandatory local content for all elementary school students from grade I to grade VI with the allocation of time provided is 2 hours of lessons. Local content is a curricular activity that aims to develop student competencies tailored to the potential and characteristics of the region. The substance of this local charge is determined by the school. These local content subjects contain learning that contains the affective, cognitive, and skills aspects that students need to gain knowledge and develop the potential and value characterized by local culture.

Local content is a curricular activity to develop competencies tailored to the characteristics and potentials of the region, including the advantages of areas whose material cannot be grouped into existing subjects. The substance of the local charge is determined by the school (Kaltsum, 2017). Thus, the local content contains learning that contains aspects of the attitudes, knowledge and skills that students need to gain knowledge about local potentials and values. From the explanation above, it can be concluded that English is not a compulsory subject that must be learned at the elementary school level. English is used as a local content subject where the school can choose whether or not to include it as one of the subjects taught in the school curriculum.

As the change of National Indonesia Curriculum into the 13th Curriculum, the probability of English subject to be taught at primary school has not found a bright spot. This is stated in Permendikbud No. 67 Tahun 2013 about the elementary school curriculum which divides the lessons in elementary school into two groups, namely the subject group whose content is developed by the center and the subject group whose content is developed by the center and equipped with local content equipped by the local government (*Permendikbud, 2013*). In other words, there is no provision for English to be used as a local content or to be extracurricular. However, there are still many elementary school that still provide English as both local and extracurricular content. Based on this, it can be concluded that English language learning in elementary schools does not yet have strong guidelines from the government itself. Each primary school, which includes english lessons, makes its own rules about how learning devices will be used.

Looking at the position and place of English language teaching for elementary school level in the education curriculum in Indonesia is uncertain, which is as if this English should not be taught early on. Whereas in that position, English is the language of science and technology; therefore without English mastery ability, a person will have difficulty in the community association of an increasingly open, fast, and uncontrollable world. So English is very important to be introduced to children as early as possible which can be started from the level of primary school education.

In addition, a survey conducted by Education First (EF) on communication skills in foreign languages, especially English, shows that Indonesia is in a country with a middle category level of English proficiency. In other words, Indonesia is a country with a level of international cooperation in the field of development, research, and innovation that is still developing and needs to be developed (Setyoningsih, 2016). Education First (EF) has also surveyed the relationship between English and various economic and social indicators,

including income generating, innovation, and connectivity. The results of the survey stated that English plays an important role in terms of national and international economic competitiveness. Good English proficiency is associated with higher income, better quality of life, dynamic business environment, extensive connectivity, and diverse innovation.

Based on the explanation above, it can be seen that communication skills, especially English, should be introduced and taught from an early age to prepare learners in the face of competitive world competition. This article aims to discuss the roles of English as Foreign Language in Indonesia, the importance of English language learning in elementary school, the level of development of elementary school children's language, the concept of teaching English in elementary school, and methods of teaching English in elementary school.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. The Roles of English

English is a language that is widely spoken in various parts of the world. English has become an international language in almost every country in the world using English both as an official language and as a foreign language. English is also the language of instruction in which almost every book, article, or discourse uses English (Nailufar, 2020). In addition, the level of development and progress of a country is also measured by how many journals in English have been published. The latest research and science is usually presented in an article and discourse in English. English is also the language of instruction from the entertainment and media industry in the world. Although it has a network that provides news or media that uses the local language, English is still used as a common language.

The importance of learning English in general is that it opens up many opportunities widely, both job and education opportunities (Maduwu, 2016). In this globalization era, many multinational companies require their employees to be able to speak English. This is because they operate in different countries and English is the language used. In addition, in the field of education there are many schools or universities that offer English-language education programs even in countries such as Korea or Japan. From here there is a cultural exchange that can only be enjoyed fully if the students are able to speak English. Mastering English means opens up many opportunities to continue education to prestigious schools abroad and to work at many big companies. Finally, the reason to learn English is because mastering more than one language makes the brain brighter. By learning English can prevent senility, besides learning English can learn to appreciate the process of learning, and know how to try

to achieve something. With a lot of practice, English skills will definitely improve on their own.

2. English as Foreign Language in Indonesia

Language is a product and cultural basis that has a function as a means of thinking, a means to express yourself, communicate, conduct social interactions, adapt to the environment, and means in supporting the growth and development of science and technology. Mastering a foreign language has a very important role in various fields, especially education, the development of knowledge, science and technology as well as the world of work. In the national education system in Indonesia, English as a foreign language, is a compulsory subject which is studied from secondary education level to higher education.

According to Tomlinson in Maduwu (2016), English as a foreign language is a language that is only used and plays a role in a formal and informal educational institution. This English language is not used as a communication language in social interaction and daily life, nor is it used as the main language in Indonesia. In other words, English is learned theoretically not practically. It contrasts with the concept of language learning which the learning must be learnt in four skills namely reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Each student who learn foreign language should obtain an approach which encourage and enrich the use of its foreign language namely English. The basic principle in learning English as a foreign language is the application of English which is used in communication and social context. It means, the key success in mastering English as foreign language is to use and communicate it in real life.

In Indonesia education system, English is learnt as an obligation because it is one of the compulsory subjects, not as a need for communication used in real life or the world of work. When the students think English is a skill needed in the future, they will learn it seriously and earnestly. The students will master English fluently when they practice and communicate it in daily life. As for example, the students who has lots of vocabulary does not mean they can speak or understand English well, a student who memorizes all kinds of tenses or grammar does not mean they are able to write English well and a child who knows lots of English expressions does not mean she or he are able to use it appropriately.

English as a foreign language in Indonesia is used as a requirement of the examination entrance in schools and universities. It is also tested along with other subjects such as mathematic, science, Indonesian, and so on. English mastery also becomes one of the requirements to study abroad by the students who wants to continue their studies in overseas.

The evidence of English mastery can be seen by certificates of Foreign Language Ability Tests such as TOEFL, TOEIC, IELTS, and JLPT.

DISCUSSION

1. The Importances of Learning English in Elementary School

Language is the first thing that children learn. When a child is born, the first thing she or he learns is language. In learning a language, there are four skills that must be mastered, namely listening, reading, writing, and speaking. However, in learning a foreign language, in addition to these four skills, there are several aspects that must be mastered namely vocabulary, word structure, and pronunciation. These three aspects influence success in mastering foreign languages, especially English. Vocabulary teaching is emphasized in language teaching, especially language teaching in children. Vocabulary is a central language and important for language learning. In other words, vocabulary limitations are a barrier for students in learning a foreign language. When they cannot increase their vocab, they slowly lose interest in learning (Setiyadi, 2020).

Moreover, Stakanova & Tolstikhina (2014) stated that the reasons English should be learned at the young age due to several reasons, as follows;

- a. Children linguistics development is in excellent stage to be used as a basis in subsequent linguistic development.
- b. When learning foreign language starts at early age, children have more opportunity and chance to learn it.
- c. Learning a foreign language since young learners provides a better opportunity to learn a foreign language in secondary school. learning a foreign language at an early age stimulates a child's ability to use his or her mother tongue better.
- d. Learning foreign languages can improve children's memory, perception, and imagination.

Furthermore, learning foreign language at young age also gives more advantages such as the earlier the children to learn foreign language, the greater the chances for language proficiency; children who are introduced English have native-like pronunciation, they develop a lifelong ability to communicate with more people, they have better understanding of other cultures, and they also better at school performance and superior in problem-solving skills (Kapantzoglou et al., 2012)

In addition, children who are able to speak foreign languages from an early age have flexible intellectual level, academic, language, and social skills that are better than others.

They will more ready to socialize with various languages and cultures which helps them when they are adults to become outstanding and qualified human being. They understanding and appreciation of their own language and cultures also will develop if they learn a foreign language early which results they will have greater access to foreign languages and cultures (Mustofa in Nirmala, 2019).

Based on the explanation above, it can be seen that foreign language should be learnt at the early stage or since young learners. When the children are introduced to a foreign language at early age, they will master it better than adults. Learning a foreign language helps children to develop their cognitive, linguistic, and emotional development. By learning a foreign language at young age, children can maximize the use of their mother tongue and also can develop their memory, perception, and imagination. Also, learning a foreign language at early stage can increase their chance and opportunity in the work and education place.

2. Language Development of Young Learners

How is language development of children? Language development in children is divided into two phases; i.e. pre-linguistic phase and linguistic phase. The pre-linguistic phase is a phase of language development since a child is a baby. In this phase, children communicate by crying, laughing, and screaming. At the next pre-linguistic stage, the child begins to babbling even though the word spoken is not yet understood. In the linguistic phase, children begin to learn to speak, children are already able to pronounce words and string many words into one sentence like adults. Period of development of children's language starting from the age of 1 - 10 years (Kaltsum, 2017; Nirmala, 2019; Setyoningsih, 2016). It can be seen in the following explanations;

1. First Stage (1 years)

Holofrastic, when children begins to declare the meaning of an entire phrase or sentence in one word. The first word spoken by the child is a continuation of the fingerling, the child likes to say one word, especially to both parents to the papa with the initial word "pa" and to mama that is "ma". In this pronunciation not all words can be spoken by the child, but the child will always try to be able to pronounce it. In this phase the child uses a word stating complex thoughts, whether in the form of desires, feelings or findings without clear differences. For example, the word sitting, for child can mean "I want to sit", or a seat, it can also be interpreted as "mama is sitting". New parents can understand and understand what the child means, if we know in what context the word is uttered, while observe mimic motion as well as other body language.

2. The Second Stage (1- 2 years)

In this stage the child has started to walk, he begins to see a lot of everything around him and wants to know its name. In this phase the child can already make simple sentences consisting of two words. The sentence sometimes consists of the subject and the predicates of sentences, sometimes the sentences is in incorrect grammar. At this time the child has difficulty to say, because the sense of want and willingness is faster than the richness of his language, so the child should have been able to tell a little story but because of insufficient vocabulary, then the child completes his words with body movements (feet and hands). In this period, the language used is no longer egocentric because the child begins to communicate with others.

3. The Third Stage (3,4,5 years)

The stages of children's development have begun to increase, the child has started to ask questions continuously and not answered enough with shorts but with a more directed explanation. Surely parents should not have the thought that their child is chatty, but help him to develop his language. Moreover, in thi stage, children not only have amazing vocabulary while speaking, they also begin to be able to pronounce and use word according to the types, especially in 18 uses of nouns and verbs.

4. The Fourth Stage (6 - so on)

This stage is characterized by the ability to combine simple sentences and complex sentences. Children have been able to use the pronoun "me" to mention themselves, able to use the word in the plural, preale, sn end, and communicate more smoothly with the environment. The child begins to be able to criticize, ask, answer, command, tell, and other forms of sentences that are common one adult "style" talk.

Young learners have several characteristics such as have high imagination and fantasy; move actively; have spontaneous action towards environment, and egocentricity. These young leaners have ability to interpret the meaning of a sentence or two; they can guess the meaning of a speech through intonation and cue; they can quickly communicate in foreign language simply because they do not feel afraid and embarrassed; they have limited ability to use language components freely; they often learn indirectly; they like something fun; they can respond quickly to a word; they easily understand the concrete concept; they have big curiosity; speak actively but has short span of attention.

Regarding to language learning, based on Cameron in Setiyadi (2020), young learners is active learners and active thinkers. They are in the age of optimal development both cognitive and linguistic skills. Thus, it will be more optimal to learn foreign language at early

age. It is supported by Bumpass in Kaltsum (2017) which offers two major advantages of introducing foreign language to children; that is children own an auditory and memory perception so they learn to repeat sounds quickly and accurate and retain the new learning without problems. Secondly, children have fewer inhibitions and respond with greater ease and less – consciousness, ever present problems, which often experiences by adult students. It can be said that, language development of young learners insists that second language or foreign language should be learnt and taught in early age because they can learn foreign language as natural as the process of learning their first language.

3. The Concepts of Language Teaching in Elementary School

When the children are introduced to foreign language at early age, they will master the language fluency. Early English language learning will assist the language acquisition process for children which facilitate them to attain great and even close to native language proficiency (Zein in Ibrahim et al., 2019). Children's language acquisition has two stages, the first language acquisition and the second language acquisition. The first language is often also called mother language, because the child first interacts and learns with the mother. While the second or foreign language acquisition is obtained when the children have acquired the first language.

The purpose of teaching English as a foreign language in elementary school is; to establish the basic language skills of students in English so that they can communicate both oral and written in school and in the environment; provide early knowledge of people, cultures, and countries from several English-speaking countries; build a positive attitude towards the English language as well as a better understanding and respect for the country's own culture. In addition, learning English from an early age helps the development of students' ingenuity, personality, and learning methods gradually (Ibrahim et al., 2019).

Based on the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia Republic No 103 Tahun 2014 about regarding the principles used in the process of learning in elementary and secondary school which is also suitable for younger learners could be seen as follows;

1. The teaching and learning process should be interactive and inspiring

It means teacher should create the teaching and learning process which is interactive and inspire the students. The process of learning should make students be able to develop their knowledge and understanding, communicate their ideas, and inspire them to be more creative, and innovative

2. The process of learning should be fun, challenging, and motivating learners to actively participate

Learning that is engaged by students should be as interesting as possible so that students are motivated to learn. This learning process is also expected to foster their curiosity so that they participate in the learning activities actively. Moreover, the teacher should be able to engage the students to actively seek, find, make choices, express opinions, and experience the learning by themselves.

Educators should be able to create an atmosphere that encourages children to actively seek, find, make choices, express opinions, and do and experience for themselves.

3. Contextual and collaborative learning

Learning activities in children should be contextual and collaborative. In learning, especially language learning, context is needed because with the context, children can understand when and where the language learned can be used. In addition, collaboration between teachers and students, students and students, teachers and teachers is also needed in learning for elementary school children.

4. Provide sufficient space for the initiative, creativity, and independence of learners

Teachers must create an atmosphere that can encourage the spirit of learning, motivation, interest, creativity, initiative, inspiration, innovation, and independence which is in harmony with the students' characteristics, interests, potentials, levels of development, and needs.

5. Utilize the use of learning materials, learning media and resources.

The use of learning materials, learning media, and resource in teaching and learning aims to make learning more contextual and meaningful. Learning media and resources can come from the natural environment or materials deliberately prepared by teachers. In addition, to make learning more contextual, teachers can invite certain professions involved in the theme, such as doctors, police, fishermen, and firefighters. It aims to develop students' talents, interests, abilities, physical, and psychological.

One factor that plays an important role in the introduction of English in primary education effectively is teachers. Teachers play an important role in motivating children to learn. Teachers need to know how children learn things. According to Musthafa (2010) there are five learning principles that must be understood by teachers when teaching children, they are;

- a. Children learn from direct experiences

The point is children learn and gain their knowledge from what is captured by their senses and what they have experienced at first-hand. This principle of learning is very influential on the choice of topics and the development of teaching materials by teachers. In other words, teachers can use experiences or activities done by students directly, for example teachers can ask about students' favorite activities when it rains.

b. Children learn from hand-on physical activities

Children is enhanced the lessons more when they are directly involved in physical activity such as playing with direct objects or physical activity. For example, the teacher asks students to create a poster with the captain in English. This learning tendency has a great implication for instructional design.

c. Children thinking embedded on context situation

Because children's thoughts are embedded in the context of the situation they face, in teaching English, it would be better if the teacher used the example in everyday life in learning. For example, in learning about colors and shapes, teachers should use examples of what color clothes the teacher wears when teaching, or how objects in the classroom form such as whiteboards, markers, and globes. In this way, the real purpose of teaching and learning English can be achieved, and it also increase children's learning motivation.

d. Children learn holistically

In this principle of learning, children formulate their knowledge by accumulating what they have learned. They create and develop 'the scripts' which serve as an organizer for digesting their experiences. For example, in shopping, children will make a shopping list first, after that they will go to the supermarket, ask for availability of goods, do bargain, do agree on prices, and paying and then leaving. Given this way of learning, children would get facilitated if the English instruction builds on what children know rather than on what is likely new to them. In this way, thinking in the foreign language would be limited only in terms of vocabulary items— not in the concept they do not have.

e. Children have short attention span

Unlike adults who can concentrate within a few hours on a topic, children can only concentrate in about 15 to 20 minutes. So that teachers should be able to use a variety of learning techniques for a limited time so that students do not get bored and at the same time they can also concentrate on the material taught at any short time.

Based on that explanation, it can be said that teaching young learner is not easy especially teaching a foreign language. Eventhough children learn second or foreign language as natural as first language, however, the use of English as a foreign language not as much and as often as the use of first language. So that, in order to expose students to English in use, an essential prerequisite for acquisition of English, teachers of English should use English all the time or as much as possible in the classroom during the instructional sessions. This functional use of English during the instructional time should be carried consistently to provide learners with opportunities so that they can earn the English used for communicative purposes with their teachers.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, English is needed in all aspects of life. The development of information, science, and technology is the main requirement to survive in this world of globalization since it is changing rapidly. To hook the interaction and communication up accross language and culture, foreign language mastery is needed especially English. Mastering English since early age is needed in order to be able to compete in this globalization era. Therefore, English needs to be taught since young age because early childhood is a golden age where childrens' brain development is faster than adult. Appropriate stimuli will influence subsequent developement greatly which includes stimuli for motoric, cognitive, language, emotional, social, and moral aspect development.

Furthermore, the process of English learning for young leaners should notice childrens' language development and the concepts of language learning for children. By paying attention to these aspects, the English learning presented by the teachers will be fun, interesting, and motivate the students to learn English actively. The learning atmosphere given also develops students' cognitive, linguistic, and psychomotor in using language contextually.

SUGGESTION

It can be suggested that, English language learning should be given since young learner so that children can master English as they master their mother tongue. In addition, it is also advisable for the government to make English as one of the compulosory subjects in primary schools so that English is no longer a local content subject. For schools that teach English as a local content, it should also consider the concepts and principles of language learning for primary school children.

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