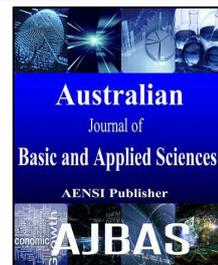




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Teacher's Challenges of Teaching English in Kindergarten in Kampot, Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study was done in rural area in Kampot Cambodia. **Objective:** The purpose of this exploratory study was to identify the challenges of English teacher in teaching English as foreign language in kindergarten located in rural area of Kampot, Cambodia. The respondents of this study were selected among teachers from the same kindergarten which teaches English subject. Qualitative research was used to collect data of teacher's challenges in teaching English via two different ways which are through observation and interview. **Results:** Findings of this study indicated that there were two main challenges that teacher faced. The challenges are typically comes from the teacher itself and also unsupportive environment. **Conclusion:** This study is significant as it is an exposure to the outsiders how is it early childhood education in low income country is going.

INTRODUCTION

As globalization and reform movements are witnessed around the world, it invites waves of change that impacting aspects of human life, including language and culture of communication and exchange (Canarajah, 2005; Hana El-Fiki, 2012). The increasing demand of effective teaching and learning in many world context is because of the English language has become the lingua franca of the global community in major professional fields such as science, technology, commerce and education. Adherents of English claim that it brings positive social change, economic opportunities, consumer goods, and new technologies (Castells, 2001; Sartor, 2010). It is true that English language has important role in improving individual achievement and thus is key to success.

Referring to the non-English speaking countries, this situation acquires reconsideration of teacher's competencies. As a way to increase the effectiveness of English language teaching and learning is by exposing them into professional development opportunities. Cambodia is one of the countries that struggle in improving English language teaching as a part of its development plan. Other country are also undergoing improvement initiatives in English language teaching such as Turkmenistan (Sartor, 2010), China (Rao, 2013), Thailand (Noom-ura, 2013), Saudi (Bahanshal, 2013), Malaysia (Nair, *et al.* 2012), Sudan (Bonilla and Cruz-Arcila, 2014) and Colombia (Hamad, 2015). The study shows that how teacher respond in various change and what make them to keep teaching English.

These days, education is one of the factors of quality of life and education is the right of everybody including children. According to 51th Convention on the Rights of the Children (CRC) on 2009 by the United Nations, in article number 12, children's right to receive education including early childhood education and we have to courage them to be active in the learning process.

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Problem Statement:

Cambodian government, in the 1980s, state that people who survived from the conflict and who were just able to read or write very little to become teacher so as to meet the need of teacher's number to perform at school. Vast amount of teachers, who are currently teaching at school and those who are not teaching, hold very low level of academic diploma which are lower secondary education level and primary education level only or even not finished primary school level, although there have been few educational personnel hold PhD degree (Phin, 2014).

Educators also faced challenge in teaching social studies as they are concern with the decline of civility in public discourse and public school. It is difficult for students to internalize the virtue of education and practice if they do not see in the politicians, media and other institution (Moore, J. 2012). Teachers that teaches about Islam, Jihad and Shari'ah law have difficulties when textbook distort the multiple interpretations of jihad and shari'ah law because of political pressures, space limitations and efforts to avoid controversies inherent in discussing religion (Moore, 2012)

The growing number of communication technologies used in organizations has presented college and university level instructors with the major challenge of addressing these topics. Teachers have some barrier on integrating communication technology like lack of time, lack of confidence and resistance to change. School barrier also contributing the factor, as it is lack of access to resources and lack of effective training in solving technical problems (Robert, 2011). Due to the global statues of the English language, and the cultural and linguistic qualities of English literature, English teachers are at the fulcrum of educational debate. The teachers are modelling transformation, revamping course lists, honing dialogic pedagogies for intercultural communication and redefining "English" as multicultural and global (Colarusso, 2010).

Research Questions And Conceptual Framework:

In order to accomplish this, three Research Questions (RQ) were formulated for the purpose of this study:

RQ1 : How teachers teach English to the children ?

RQ2 : Do teachers have problems while teaching English ?

Conceptual framework of the study covers the research direction that relevant to the teacher's challenge on teaching English. Refer to the first objective and research question (RQ1), second research question (RQ2) and third research question (RQ3), the figure below shows the flow of the research.

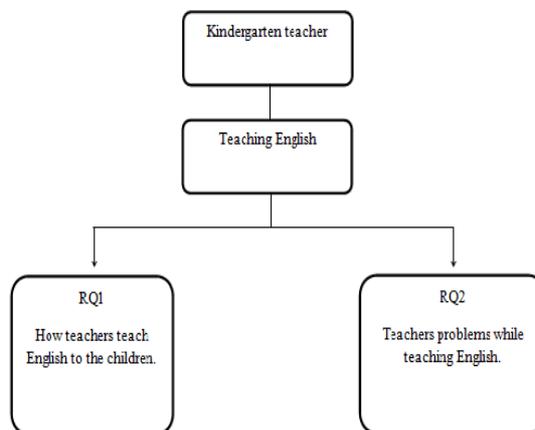


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework of the study.

The past research related to research questions is discussed about how teachers teach English to the children. For RQ1, Barnett (2008) stated that kindergarten education has significant lasting effects on cognitive abilities, social behavior and further schooling history. Responsive and cognitively stimulating care fosters language and cognitive skills that makes learning process easier in early years (Shonkoff and Philips, 2000; Balat, 2014). In a study related to the research question, there is a significant positive relationship between kindergarten children's basic concept acquisition and their learning styles. It was found that visual and auditory learning styles explain 10.6% of the basic concept knowledge level (Balat, 2014). Thus, the basic concept knowledge of the child is predicted by their learning styles. Teacher's teaching style must be compatible to children's learning style to ensure the effective learning.

According to the study of teaching style in teaching English in Saudi's kindergarten, the technique they used, the Word Wall, showed the children can learn the new vocabulary more effectively when the word are seen during the whole school day and it is improving the child's reading influence which its require intensive

exposure to vocabulary and unlimited interaction with language users using senses of hearing, seeing and also interaction (Al Shaiji and Al Saleem, 2014). In order to teach children to speak in English, a study in Indonesia finds out that children learn to speak English in many different ways or learning activities such as answering the questions (most frequent), translating, answering Yes or No question, repeating words and more activities they commonly shared by all the subjects were listening, imitating and repeating a model's speech (Mindari and Saukah, 2012).

For the second RQ, According to Patterson (2012), was an exploration of teacher reports of their preschool students' communication within bilingual setting. The two teachers in the study described children's communication as an integrated part of their behavior, activities and interactions, rather than characterizing the communication skills a child used. In the teachers' descriptions of children's communication, language functioned as a vehicle for children's participation in the life of classroom in ways that reflected the children's individual personal characteristics. This participation framework contrast with a language systems and skills view, in which language form, content and use are the focus (Duchan, 2006).

In a study conducted among teachers, there are gap of teacher's perception of language which language is a subject to be taught, not a medium and the teacher's perception of language teaching at the early stages are language is literacy. Thus, memorization is the way to learn as much as language as possible (Eapen, 2011). When it comes to teacher's belief of teaching English, a teacher would be very shy and less motivated when they keep thinking that they are not good in English and it is psychological barrier of teachers itself (Chu Y, 2014). Finding in a study suggested that all aspects of classroom discourse (cognitive, academic, linguistic, social and affective) should be taken into consideration (Inan and Yuksel D., 2013).

Methodology:

This study involves several activities such as a selection of research methods, research sample, collecting and analysis data and also writing report of this research. Thus, the design of a qualitative approach is to understand the aspects that contribute to the teacher's challenge to answer the first research question (RQ1) and second research question (RQ2). Researcher decided to do a qualitative research to find out and take information from the respondent and also observation during the teaching. Teacher's challenge in teaching English can be obtained through observation and interview after their approval in order to get valid answer. The interview was an unstructured question so that the teachers can give their own views.

Sample:

In this research, the main data are collected from two teachers in the kindergarten. According to Amir Hasan Dawi (2006), sample is the individuals whose will answer the research question and usually researcher will take a part of whole population as a sample. In the selection of sample, there are few criteria that should be obeyed, which are;

- (i) The teacher that teach English in kindergarten
- (ii) The kindergarten must be the same,
- (iii) The local kindergarten teacher

Location:

Researcher decided to carry on a research at Cambodia as she was there and can do the research in the meantime. In this research, the setting is in the rural area of Kampot Province in Cambodia. When researcher found out that the kindergarten in the area are teaching English to the children, preparation to find out the challenges are made. The kindergarten was built from the abandoned class for Islamic School or madrasah. Women from Malaysia take the opportunity to open a class for the local children and hiring youngsters to teach the children. The woman that responsible to build a kindergarten in her village finds out there are abandoned classes of madrasah (religious school) and she want to reuse the class. She takes a room, clean it up and provide some school facilities and recruiting teachers. Since the area is populated by the Muslim, the kindergarten was named Islamic Montessori School. There are 25 of children that attended the school without paying fees.

Result:

Teacher Centered Approach:

According to the observation made during school session, researcher identified that both of the teacher are using teacher centered approach when teaching the children. It is seen when the teaching was conducted in a way of lectures to the children. In the class, English Teacher 1 was gives talks and shows some demonstration to the children. It is depends on what they are teaching, for instance on the first day observation,, ET1 wrote 'K' on the blackboard to show how to write 'A' to the children and the children have to write 'K' in their exercise book. When children have some difficulties to write, she came to help them one by one.

Afterwards, interview was held to get further information. Conversation with ET1 state that she only knows teaching method by communication with children;

“It is normal here. Usually teacher will do that. I always knew that teaching is what teacher giving knowledge while student are listening.” (ET1)

“If the children could not listen to my command, how would I let they play while learning? They are difficult to handle if I let them play.” (ET2)

Same goes to the ET2 that also teach the same way as ET1. On the third day of observation, researcher saw ET2 taught children by giving them explanation of writing ‘J’ and sometimes his hand were waving in the air like writing ‘J’. He is taking his high school teacher as model to teach which is by giving lectures to the children. He also said that it could be a disaster if let the children play as I said children should be taught in play form. While ET1 said she will not teach children in play form because the children will only make noise and running in the class.

Flash Card as Main Teaching Aids:

From the observing both of the teacher, there are only letter card and flash cards as teaching aids in teaching English. During showing demonstration, ET1 will use letter card and flash cards that she makes it herself. ET2 also use the same flash cards and letter cards. They are just shared the same teaching aids to teach the children. For further information, researcher asking ET1 and ET2 about the teaching aids. When asked how they were teaching, ET1 said that;

“... I write the letter and the word on the blackboard and then I read after I use flashcard to show the children what is in the flashcard...” (ET1)

She will use the letter card to show them how the letters look like and write it on the blackboard. Whereas ET2 tell the researcher how he is teaching English to the children;

“When the classes start: I just review some word or letters or English alphabet which I have put for them yesterday or before. So they will recall back their lesson. I just select one, few or several of them to answer or more, according to how much time we have.

Then we start new lesson or letters but we still put last lesson for repeating as well. I write the letter on the blackboard and they will copy the letter in their book and then I will say aloud the letter. They will follow me to say the letter.” (ET2)

ET2 told researcher the same thing that ET1 have done in teaching English to the children by using flashcards. As researcher can see in the observation, that the only teaching aids the both of the teacher use in teaching English and they did the flash cards and letter cards together in their free time.

Whole Class Oriented:

From the observation made, researcher found that the ET1 always teach in one large group (entire class) activity. The whole class oriented can be seen when she was took the children to the outside of the class and do the gardening and cleaning the area of the kindergarten. That was the activities where children interact and move around and do hands-on activities as well. Furthermore, ET1 has explicitly connected learning to children’s knowledge and experience by doing the outdoor activities.

According to the ET1, she likes to take them outside and do some activities like gardening.

“It is easy when we tell to do garden...” (ET1)

“Yes, we do it every day in groups. Everybody must do the cleaning. But gardening.. I don’t do it.” (ET2)

While ET2 are not took the children to do outdoor activities like ET1. He is more likely to stay in class and do the teaching like usual and he did the same throughout the whole week researcher observed him. According to the interview, he said the children are usually do the gardening, but not under his lesson. But the cleaning are must for any subject, thus he told that the children will do the cleaning every day.

Language Barrier:

According to the interview, both of the teachers mention about the difficulties of teaching children that have very low exposure of English. They agreed that it is difficult for the children to learn English as it is not their mother tongue and they only use English at the kindergarten because of their parent are not educated. Thus, the learner or the children having the problems to understand what are the teachers said and the teacher can hardly make they understand. That is why the teachers did not using full English command in their lesson. According to ET1;

“I always try to speak English to my students but they cannot understand so I speak Khmer.” (ET1)

ET2 also faced the same problem. The children will only understand his command if he already said it before because they recognized the command. But if he used new words, they will misunderstand. He also will repeat the command if the children not understand and sometimes he will define the word that the children not understand by play a role or make an action. ET2 realize that the problems are because of the English language is the foreign language, not their mother tongue.

Insufficient Teaching Materials and Facilities:

According to the observation, the teaching used by the teachers is mostly flash cards and letter cards. Afterwards, researcher makes a confirmation with the teachers regarding their challenge of insufficient teaching materials and facilities. They admitted that the lacking of teaching tool make them feel burdened sometimes according to ET1;

“...I think what make it tough, he things that make me feel burdened money is one part, teaching tool is one part, children itself is one part and myself also is one part.” (ET1)

While ET2 are very positive when researcher asked him if he feel burdened in teaching. He said in order to build nation a teacher should not have to feel burdened as it is an authorities given from the society to the selected people. Thus the teachers should use all their might to deliver knowledge and tried harder to educate people. It is undeniable that ET2 also faced some difficulties when teaching English, but he is still look forward and positively takes the problem as a challenge of being teacher.

No Exposures in Preparation of Lesson Plan:

Researcher found out that both of the teachers do not know how to prepare a lesson plan. They seem have no idea about the lesson plan when researcher asked them. Thus, researcher asked if they have attended a teacher training before. They admitted that they never attend a teacher training and that is why they do not know how to prepare lesson plan. ET1 said she has been to kindergarten at Malaysia in 2014 for a month and she observed how the teachers were teaching. But she did not learn about preparing lesson plan.

“I didn’t prepare lesson plan, I just set one letter and one word per day.” (ET1)

“Normally, before start our class, I just already prepared the timetable lesson before.” (ET2)

Discussion And Implication:

Discussion:

There are vary of teaching style of teaching English to the children including children centred approach, inquiry-based learning, learning through playing, mastery learning and many more. The best teaching style are not only one way to do it, a teacher should know how to integrate several teaching style in effective teaching.

Teachers are the main authority figure in this approach. It is the primary role of teachers to pass knowledge and information onto their students. It is undeniable that when teaching is teacher centred, the classroom remains orderly. Children are quiet and the teacher retains full control of the classroom and its activity. It may be because the teacher directs all classroom activities; they do not have to worry that students will miss an important topic.

But, when student work alone, they do not learn to collaborate with other students and communication skills may suffer. The teachers should think that communication is the important skill in learning English. The children would be boring, their minds may wander and they may miss important facts because they do not understand.

Teaching aids are an object or device used by a teacher to enhance or enliven classroom instruction. The process of teaching and learning largely depends on the available teaching materials. Teaching aids also are those materials that help the teacher explain better knowledge and help the students understand. It’s like the picture of lesson. It is also example of environment when refer to the Sim’s teaching model. The teaching aids create the environment of interest for the children

Individuals are prone to forget and hold on more to memories of things they have seen than heard. Communication barriers in the classroom make it difficult for students to get the most out of their education. Teachers fail to create engaging lessons and struggle to connect to their children on a one-to-one basis. Children with unaddressed language or speech difficulties often have trouble communicating with their teachers and classmates. Personality differences and peer pressure add to the mix, making some classroom interactions feel awkward or forced.

Language barrier between children and teacher made the teaching even harder. The classroom communication breaks down when children are bored and disinterested in their learning. Children do not need to be entertained all day, but teachers should work hard to develop engaging lessons with interesting, relevant activities. In the nutshell, peer pressure creates communication problems in the classroom when children respond to the teachers by acting funny, cool or disengage. Children with low motivation mock their friends whenever they start to have conversation with teachers. Peer pressure can influence classrooms as early as kindergarten.

Implication:

Once, Malaysia have been through ups and down of raising education system to the standards. Same goes to the Cambodia, now they are facing the phase of the beginning of the raising education system. There are many lack and problems the teachers have to face every day in order to educate their nations. This exposure should make Malaysia proud of the firm education system built since the Independence Day because majority of the citizens are now able to get education with government’s initiatives.

Regarding of the research, it is clear now that teaching style affect to the effective teaching and learning. Teacher should realize that children are differing to each other and thus they have to vary the teaching according to the right lesson. Teaching materials are one of the crucial matters in effective teaching. Teacher should provide the suitable teaching aids for effective learning and think creatively how to make teaching and learning fun and interesting every day.

Whole class oriented is good if teacher know how to handle children's behavior. If not, the class will be out of control and teacher should know if she can form small group of children. The problems of teaching English difficulty are teachers did not realize that they are lacking in every part of teaching, they are having rough times. Typically most teachers could not give the best if there are problem that she cannot control.

The teaching and learning will just be usual and hard to get success if the teacher could not even do lesson plan. Moreover the facilities are inadequate and teacher might have to spend their own money to make learning interesting. That is difficulties to the teacher as teacher also have monetary problem. However, as the teacher improve themselves, teaching and learning can be effective throughout the day.

Conclusion:

This research has examined the situation in teaching English to young learner in Kampot, Cambodia. The cases of Cambodia illustrate the challenges and prospects of teacher professionalism in other developing country. Overall, the picture that emerges is quite positive with a number of challenges that might affect the teaching process in the kindergarten. The research has revealed the difficulties of the teachers in teaching English with their level of exposure in teaching are inadequate.

The clear lesson from the research reported here is that, if the government wish to be successful in their introduction of languages into the primary curriculum, initial investment in policy is simply first step. Continued resources are necessary to address the ever changing challenges faced by teachers and to ensure positive outcomes in early language learning.

Interesting environment for teaching and learning are necessary for teacher to deliver knowledge. Teacher also should stress on children's learning style so that they will improving themselves in learning. Rather than focusing on whether academic content has a place in early childhood classrooms, try to focus on how to teach in a way that is tailored to young learners. Focus on creating engaging, fun, developmentally appropriate learning experiences for all kindergarteners and acknowledge the importance of embedding enriching language experiences within that environment.

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