

The Essential Aspects of Teaching Children to Read in English

Hartati^{1*}, Siti Misra Susanti¹, Henny¹, Asma Kurniati¹, Marwah¹

¹Universitas Muhammadiyah Buton, Indonesia

*Correspondence: tatarlin85@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to introduce the essential aspects that teachers should know in teaching children to read in English. The age level of the children referred to in this paper are children aged 5 to 7 years. The aspects include the characteristics of children, the importance of teaching children to read in English, decoding and phonemic awareness. The aspects were selected from the results of the analysis of previous related literature that are still considered important for discussion so as to provide new treasures for teachers in particular. With this paper, it is hoped that it can enrich information about teaching children to read in English and increase the teacher's insight about teaching children to read in English so that teaching reading can take place effectively.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Published September 24th 2021



KEYWORDS

Read in English, Teaching, Children

ARTICLE LICENCE

© 2021 Universitas Hasanuddin

Under the license CC BY-SA

4.0



1. Introduction

Teaching English to children in a number of kindergartens in the city of Baubau has not been widely carried out. The teaching of English that takes place in the classrooms is still very limited and with little material composition. Even in some kindergartens, English has not been taught to children. This phenomenon occurs because one of them is the low level of linguistic competence, in this case the English language possessed by teachers in kindergarten. This is understandable considering the educational background of these teachers is not English language education (Al-Obaydi, Nashruddin, Rahman, & Suherman., 2021). However, considering the many benefits that can be obtained when having English language skills, English must be taught regularly to children from the beginning of their education in kindergarten. In addition, the challenges brought by the era that everyone seems to be required to have proficiency in a foreign language, namely English language (Junaidi, J., Hamuddin, B., Simangunsong, W., Rahman, F., & Derin, T., 2020).

English has at least four basic skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. These four skills must be mastered to achieve good mastery of English. In this paper, we discuss one of the four skills, namely reading and more specifically about the important aspects of teaching children to read in English. Understanding written texts is the goal to be achieved from reading (Pang dkk., 2003., Rahman, F. (2017).). For the children also found the desire to understand the reading in front of them. However, understanding reading is not created as natural and easy as understanding speech. Understanding reading is still difficult for children to do without the help of the teacher. As revealed by Schwartz & Sparks (2019) that reading is complicated which does not happen naturally and cannot be guessed just like that. As far as teaching English to children is concerned, teachers must understand the process of teaching reading in English and understand that it is neither easy to do nor challenging (Garton & Copland, 2019). Therefore, teaching children to read in English requires the help of teachers with adequate skills in the aspects of teaching reading in English to children.

This paper aims to discuss essential aspects of teaching children to read in English that teachers should know with the hope that this paper can contribute to increasing knowledge in the field of teaching children to read in English. More specifically, this paper is intended to be consumed by teachers in kindergarten so as to expand their conceptual knowledge in teaching children to read in English.

2. Method

The essential aspects and which are considered important about teaching children to read in English in this paper are derived from the results of the analysis of previous related literature which are still deemed necessary and important for discussion.

3. Findings and Discussion

This section discusses three essential aspects that teachers should know in teaching children to read in English.

3.1. The Characteristics of Children

One of the important aspects that must be realized by teachers when teaching English to children, in this paper children aged 5 to 7 years, is the characteristics of children. Teachers must realize that learning English for children is not an ordinary thing. English has attracted great attention to teachers so that it has an impact on children's English learning (Hashemi & Azizinezhad, 2011). Considering this, the teacher has the obligation to know the characteristics of children well so that they can teach English properly. As mentioned by Scott & Ytreberg (1990) that the characteristics of children are things that need to be known and taken into consideration when teaching language to children.

According to Scott & Ytreberg (1990), children can say what they have heard; children can come up with plausible reasons; children can use a wide range of intonation patterns into their mother tongue; children can understand direct human interaction; children know that rules must be obeyed; children use language skills long before they know it; children perceive things around them through hand movements, sight and hearing; children are very logical in that they follow what they see from the teacher; children don't always ask; children have short attention span and concentration; children do not always understand what the teacher is pointing at; children do not always admit that they do not understand what the teacher has explained; children cannot choose what they want to learn; children love to play and learn to the fullest when they enjoy it; children can be serious and think what they are doing is important and real; children have high enthusiasm and positive attitude towards learning so teachers must believe in them that they will be successful in their learning.

Musthafa (2010) mentioned that teaching English to children can be effective when teachers consider the criteria that include English should be used as often as possible so that children have broad opportunities to be exposed to English; classrooms should be designed with things that can be clearly seen in English; teachers should use activity-based learning methods such as TPR; teachers must be able to maintain children's interest in English material by presenting it in a variety of ways; teachers should focus on developing children's language, namely vocabulary considering it is important in meeting the needs of communicating in English; the teacher must always repeat the material that has been taught to ensure the child's English acquisition; teachers should provide English language acquisition or learning programs for children on a regular basis; and teachers must be the right example for children in English learning activities.

From the aspects of the characteristics of the children above and also followed by the indicators of effective English teaching that must be known by the teacher, it gives an important meaning for teaching reading in English to children. Teaching reading which involves hearing, sight and a number of rules can be followed by children. Teaching reading that requires seriousness in observing the letters can be followed by children because they are able to seriously pursue what they are doing. Children have great potential to succeed in learning to read in English because they have a positive attitude and are enthusiastic in living their learning. Considering these things, teachers must be able to create effective reading teaching for children.

3.2. The Importance of Teaching Children to Read in English

Harmer (2005) reveals that the principles of teaching reading are reading is not a passive skill; students must be active in the reading activities they encounter; students must be encouraged to respond to the content of the reading text, not just the language; a major factor of reading is predicting; match the task with the topic; a good teacher is to fully exploit the reading text. Teaching reading to children is still a challenge for teachers, especially when teaching children to read in English, so it cannot be denied that teaching reading in English to children is often avoided or very rarely done by teachers in the classroom. By understanding the principles in teaching reading can help teachers prepare reading instruction to children.

Reading plays a very important role in human life, both reading in the first language and reading in a foreign language in this case is English language. Teachers need to be aware teaching reading in English to children is very appropriate to be done early in their growth and development process because of a number of benefits. According to Długosz (2000), children will be able to acquire correct pronunciation and satisfactory receptive abilities in the language,

after mastering reading, children will accelerate their progress in mastering the entire range of linguistic skills. Knowing these benefits, teachers need to realize that teaching reading affects the improvement of other language skills one of them is writing. Reading also benefits the development of children's first language acquisition, increases the number of vocabulary, and improves grammar, writing and speaking skills in one's first language (Anderson & Nagy, 1993; Cunningham, 2005; Krashen, 2011, in Aisyiyah, 2020).

3.3. Decoding and Phonemic Awareness

Understanding the concept of decoding is very important for teachers because decoding has a close relationship with reading. The next aspect of discussion in this paper is decoding. In reading, the need of interaction between the reader and the text should meet in the first place; and there is a requirement that the reader must be able to interpret the written words (Qrquez & Rashid, 2017). Children as language learners have a great opportunity to be able to read in English as early as possible. Children can read in English when they are taught to read in English. Reading skills will be mastered by children when they first have decoding skills (Beck & Juel, 2002). Ehri (1994) stated that one way to be able to read words is decoding. Knowing how to decode is one of the important steps to become a fluent reader (Schwartz & Sparks, 2019). Thus, teachers must be able to present decoding teaching in English to children appropriately.

Teachers need to comprehend some prerequisites and challenges that children find during reading words before teaching children to read. They are that children can decode words when they know that printed words have meaning; children can decode words when they know that words are composed of letters so it becomes very important for the teacher to teach all the letters; children can decode words when they know that they are made up of letters that make sounds when spoken so it is important for teachers to teach children to be able to map the letters into their sounds (Beck & Juel, 2002).

There are two approaches to teaching reading in English that are effective that must be applied to children in terms of helping the achievement of their decoding skills that include the phonics method and the look and say approach (Długosz, 2000). The phonics method, which should be understood, is not a single strategy. Several strategies for teaching the relationship between letters and sounds from this phonic method have been found (Beck & Juel, 2002). Phonics includes the relationship between sounds with certain letters (Willis, 2009). The phonics approach is considered not easy so the teacher can start teaching with three or four letters that make up a word (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). The second approach is look and say. This approach is based on words and phrases written on flashcard media. The teacher begins to teach reading with everyday words that are already recognized by the children. The teacher points to a word and pronounces it while pointing to the object. (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990)

Teachers have a role in helping children become good readers. One way is to raise early phonemic awareness in children (Willis, 2009). Children realizing that letters have a relationship with sounds is called phonemic awareness. Children begin to form phonemic awareness when the teacher reads them and points to the words. This lets children know that letters symbolize sound (Willis, 2009). Phonemic awareness has a close relationship with reading ability early and later when children enter elementary school (Pang dkk., 2003). To be able to raise children's phonemic awareness is to apply pattern games; where this pattern game can also develop children's ability to recognize words (Willis, 2009).

4. Conclusion

Teaching children to read in English is a challenge for teachers. Teachers should have conceptual and technical knowledge about teaching English to children in general and specifically teach children to read in English considering that reading skills or reading ability are one of the important things for children's academic preparation and becoming fluent readers. Children as an important indicator in English learning activities make teachers have to understand the characteristics of children so that the treatment in learning can be carried out properly. Teaching English to children needs to be done by considering the principal things related to the characteristics of these children.

Knowing the benefits of teaching children to read in English is also an important aspect that must be instilled into teachers. There is no doubt that teaching children to read in English can develop their other language skills which are very important for their educational success. English for children is not a new thing but it is not an easy thing for children to do on their own. The teacher as someone who has a major role in teaching children must realize that teaching children to read English must start with the right steps. Knowing the concepts of decoding skills and phonemic awareness is the right first step in teaching children to read in English.

References

- Aisyiyah, M. N. (2020). *Exploring English Student Teachers' Reading Habits And Preferences*. 13.
- Beck, I. L., & Juel, C. (2002). *The Role of Decoding in Learning to Read*. 12.
- Długosz, D. W. (2000). Rethinking the role of reading in teaching a foreign language to young learners. *ELT Journal*, 54(3), 284–290. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/54.3.284>
- Ehri, L. C. (1994). *Development of the Ability to Read Words: Update*. 35.
- Garton, S., & Copland, F. (2019). *The Routledge Handbook of Teaching English to Young Learners*. 564.
- Harmer, J. (2005). *How to teach English: An introduction to the practice of English language teaching* (1. publ., 14. impr). Longman.
- Hashemi, M., & Azizinezhad, M. (2011). Teaching English To Children: A Unique, Challenging Experience For Teachers, Effective Teaching Ideas. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 30, 2083–2087. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.10.405>
- Junaidi, J., Hamuddin, B., Simangunsong, W., Rahman, F., & Derin, T. (2020). ICT usage in teaching English in Pekanbaru: Exploring junior high school teachers' problems. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, 29(3), 5052-5063.
- Musthafa, B. (2010). *Teaching English to Young Learners in Indonesia: Essential Requirements*. 2, 6.
- Pang, E. S., Muaka, A., Bernhardt, E. B., & Kamil, M. L. (2003). *Teaching reading*. 24.
- Rahman, F. (2017). The revival of local fairy tales for children education. *Theory and Practice in language Studies*, 7(5), 336
- Al-Obaydi, L. H., Nashruddin, Rahman, F., & Suherman., L. O. A. (2021). The Use of Action Research in EFL Socio-professional Context: Students-teachers' Perceptions. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 4(2), 232–240. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.34050/elsjish.v4i2.10876>
- Qrgez, M., & Rashid, R. (2017). Reading Comprehension Difficulties among EFL Learners: The Case of First and Second -Year Students at Yarmouk University in Jordan. *Arab World English Journal*, 8(3), 421–431. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol8no3.27>
- Schwartz, S., & Sparks, S. D. (2019). *How Do Kids Learn to Read? What the Science Says*. 9.
- Scott, W. A., & Ytreberg, L. H. (1990). *Teaching English to children*. Longman.
- Willis, J. (2009). *How your child learns best*. Sourcebooks ; Manning Partnership [distributor].