

ACQUAINTING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS THROUGH NURSERY RHYMES AT PLAYGROUP

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Abstract: *Most children like and enjoy singing. It can be used as one of the materials for foreign language learning. Using nursery rhymes in the classroom can be a great break from following a set curriculum. This study aimed to know the way to acquaint English to young learners through nursery rhymes, to identify the criteria of nursery rhymes that suits the students, and to know the strengths and challenges in acquainting English to young learners through nursery rhymes at the playgroup. Qualitative research was employed to conduct this study. To collect the data, some techniques were carried out namely observation, interview, and documentation. The results revealed that the acquaintance of young learners with English through nursery rhymes considers the content, students' readiness, and class atmosphere. The nursery rhymes had to teach the character education. The strengths in acquainting English to young learners through nursery rhymes were the commitment among the managers/organizers, teachers and parents, and the high awareness that English was important. And, the challenges were low teachers' pedagogical competency, facilities, curriculum/material, and non-English school or living environment. This study suggests that the teachers must set the class atmosphere which supports the learning process using nursery rhymes.*

Keywords: *Nursery Rhymes, English for Young Learners, Playgroup*

A. Introduction

English is as main need in this era. Technology has developed so fast. Many things related to children are served in the English language, like toys, games, learning process, etc. Meanwhile, not all parents can support their children in learning English. This need is responded to and supported by the school curriculum, especially in playgroups. Nevertheless, making children understand and can practice English is not easy. They need to have fun learning, especially in appropriate media.

Teaching English to young learners will be very interesting and challenging. The teaching and learning process is always fun and exciting. Teaching English to children is definitely different from teaching English to adults. Children have different characteristics, desires, and motivations. Since the children are very active, so the teacher should be attractive and patient in teaching.

The teacher should be able to understand the characteristics of the students. As stated by Shin and Crandall in Paradisa (2017, p. 35) that children are physically active, imaginative, easily distracted, and have a short attention span. Childhood is a period when children like to play and explore the environment. Fauziati (2015, pp. 83–84) also states that children like playing and talking about everything. They also understand and retain the meaning better when they see some objects associated with them.

Piaget in Fauziati (2015, pp. 82–83) explains that the children constantly interact with the world around them, address the difficulties that the environment presents, and learning occurs as a result of taking action to solve the challenges. The child actively constructs the knowledge that arises from these behaviors rather than being imitated or born with it. Thought is considered as arising from action in this way; action is internalized or carried out mentally in the imagination, and thinking develops as a result. This implies kids learn by doing things with their hands or by observing and manipulating objects in their environment. They learn mostly by doing participation in activities.

It is clearly explained above that children learn something by doing activities. They commonly do not realize that they already get something to learn. Children learn by doing. It means that they learn language by using it: listening to it, speaking it, and writing it (Palim & Power in Fauziati, 2015, p. 84).

Teaching English to young learners needs an appropriate method and interesting media which can enliven the learning atmosphere. To improve children's English vocabulary, Total Physical Response (TPR) is a method that can be used by the teacher (Ulya & Ihsan, 2021, p. 246). Meanwhile, the Nursery rhyme is one of the media which meets both the requirements: developing children's English vocabulary and enlivening the learning atmosphere. As stated by Fauziati (2015, p. 85), nursery rhyme is one medium of classroom technique that creates an amusing atmosphere. By using nursery rhyme, the English learning for children will be fun and exciting. The children will be happy and not get bored.

According to Paradisa (2017, p. 35), nursery rhymes are simple traditional songs or poems for children. They contain word order and grammatical sentences that children can learn from. Most nursery rhymes are short, repetitive, and rhythmic. Due to the characteristics, it helps children recall what they have learned easily. However, there are some criteria that should be considered by the teacher in choosing appropriate rhymes. A nursery rhyme is a way of using simple, repetitive poems with a young child. They can be fun and enjoyable adult-child activities. Nursery rhymes with movement or touching are the greatest because they help children understand the relationship between sounds, words, and events. They can give marvelous educational value to the children (Rini, 2017, p. 63). Teaching nursery rhymes help young children become ready to learn to read. They hear new words and the ways of making sentences from the rhymes as many rhymes contain stories that help children understand and remember a series of events (Fauziati, 2015, p. 85). It is in line with Sayakhan and Bradley that nursery rhymes can enhance early reading skills and phonemic awareness (Sayakhan & Bradley, 2019, p. 52).

The teachers may use some supporting media in teaching English using nursery rhyme. Nursery rhymes can be taught through computers/laptop, mobile phones or tablets. There are also many nursery rhymes applications that can be used by teachers as a teaching aid in introducing the nursery rhymes. These applications provide nursery rhymes videos containing lyrics that children can sing along to. The animated videos provide visual aids to help the children understand words that are abstract (Paradisa, 2017, p. 36). The usage of nursery rhymes applications will create a more enjoyable atmosphere for the children to learn English.

Some studies related to the use of nursery rhymes in teaching English for young learners have been conducted by some researchers. The first is the study conducted by Lulu Hidayati (Hidayati, 2015, pp. 1–39) who investigated kinds of nursery rhymes used by the teacher and how to apply them in teaching English for young learners. The second study was conducted by Pourkalhor and Tavakoli (Pourkalhor & Tavakoli, 2017, pp. 111–116). This research presents some basic principles of language learning, characteristics of children, and classroom techniques, especially nursery rhymes and songs. Meanwhile, Hery and Arshad (Hery & Arshad, 2020, pp. 212–226) examined the use of nursery rhymes in improving young learners' English vocabulary skills.

However, the way to acquaint English to the young learner, as well as the strengths and challenges in acquainting English to young learners through nursery rhymes have not been reported by the previous research. Therefore, the purposes of this study were to know the way to acquaint English to young learners through nursery rhymes, to identify the criteria of nursery rhymes that suits the students, and to know the strengths and challenges in acquainting English to young learners through nursery rhymes at Halimatus Sa'diyah playgroup. This research was conducted because the targets were the new students in a new playgroup where everything had been on process.

B. Method

This study used the exploratory case study. According to Creswell (2012, p. 465), it is an in-depth analysis of a bounded system (e.g., activity, event, process, or individuals) based on significant data collection. It was categorized as qualitative research. It involved multiple case design projects with three cases. For this study, the writers employed an exploratory case study approach since it allowed them to answer not only what, but also how and why questions, while taking into account how a phenomenon was influenced by the setting in which it occurred (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Furthermore, the data gathered in this sort of case study was typically richer and more in-depth than data gathered in other types of case studies or experimental designs.

In this research, the researchers collected the data using direct observation, interview, and documentation. For documentation, the researchers used document, pictures and video recording. The subjects of the research were the students of Halimatus Sa'diyah playgroup, Kudus. That playgroup is under the management of Dharma Wanita Persatuan (DWP) of Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kudus, Central Java. The class observed was one class because it was the only class found in the first academic year. The number of participants was 23. For getting the detailed data, the researchers interviewed the Head of DWP, three Halimatus Sa'diyah teachers and a manager.

For data analysis, the researchers used the theory from Miles and Huberman. There were several stages done by the researchers. The first was data reduction. It is the stage of data simplification according to the needs so that it is easy to get information. In this stage, the researchers collected and grouped the data into three categories. They were very important, less important, and not important data. By doing this step, the researchers could store which data was necessary and discard data that was not necessary for research. By using that way, the data became simpler and clearer so the research could be specific in identifying the learning process using nursery rhymes. The next stage was data presentation. The goal was to make it easier to convey and understand by

the readers. The third stage was conclusion drawing. The information obtained from data that has been compiled and grouped was then presented descriptively. The last stage was making conclusions based on the data.

C. Result and Discussion

A person's language is most vulnerable between the ages of two and seven. It is an important period to develop and stimulate all aspects of children's growth and development (Humaida et al., 2021, p. 200). Thus, before this critical era ends, children must be exposed to all components of language not only English as foreign language but also Arabic for example teaching huruf hijaiyah (Maula et al., 2021, p. 285). It is critical to introduce appropriate and correct language during this sensitive phase because this ability is essential for communicating with the environment. English should be taught to children as soon as feasible. Indonesia's first foreign language is English. In this step, the learning process must be completed. The use of appropriate and effective materials for the cognitive development of young learners, as well as a pleasant learning environment, should be a primary consideration for the process's success.

Several factors influenced the success of the English learning process in early childhood. Many factors influenced the success of the English learning process in early life, including 1. Qualified instructors, or teachers who could activate the teaching and learning process. 2. Learning materials and facilities that were adequate. 3. A well-designed, straightforward, and appealing program. On the other hand, it was important to remember that childhood is a time for playing. Every child is a one-of-a-kind individual, and the world of play was a serious but thrilling activity for them. The suitable technique had to be then developed by an instructor so that the English learning process was more fascinating and pleasurable while yet adhering to the relevant language norms. The method should be consistent with the goals of language recognition in general. The goal was for youngsters to be able to communicate with their environment, grasp good and acceptable language, and dare to voice their ideas or

opinions. Nursery rhymes are one of several approaches and techniques that can be utilized to learn English. It was applied at Halimatus Sa'diyah Playgroup, Kudus for supporting the students' language learning process. This institution is new but it has big passion in English learning because organizers, teachers and parents do realize that international language need to be taught to the students when they are in golden age.

Halimatus Sa'diyah Playgroup is an institution of early childhood education established by DWP IAIN Kudus. The hundreds members of DWP IAIN Kudus consist of women's civil servants and civil servants' wives at IAIN Kudus. Formerly, DWP IAIN Kudus had a monthly meeting to discuss several issues related to household affairs and share some information or skills. The meeting organizers were the faculties and units at IAIN Kudus. They were Tarbiyah, Islamic Da'wa and Communication, Syariah, Islamic Economy and Business, and Ushuluddin faculty.

DWP IAIN Kudus has several sectors such as education and social sectors. The social sector has some programs, for example giving the donation to flood victims around Kudus. The economy sector has a program to coordinate the members of DWP IAIN Kudus to have a qurban or sacrifice on Eid al-Adha. Another program of economic sector is to establish a micro-economic institution which is called Koperasi Simpan Pinjam (KSP). Meanwhile, DWP has a program to establish an institution of early childhood education in education sector. This program comes from the DWP members' ideas. Halimatus Sa'diyah Playgroup was established in February 2019. It is located in west campus of IAIN Kudus. It is held to accommodate the IAIN Kudus employees who have difficulties in taking care of their children while they go to work. This playgroup is not only for the children of IAIN Kudus employees but also for the society in Kudus.

Along conducting the study, the researchers observed the English teaching and learning process along ten meetings about how to acquaint English to young learners through nursery rhymes, the criteria of nursery rhymes that suits on the students, strengths and challenges in acquainting English to young learners through nursery rhymes. The documentation

about learning process and curriculum was done. Moreover, the researchers also interviewed the manager, organizers and teachers of Halimatus Sa'diyah for getting the supporting data.

Nursery rhymes can make the participants feel fun. Nursery rhymes can give the emotional effect so the audiences easier to internalize its meaning. Brewster et al. (2004, p. 49) stated that the reason for using songs (including nursery rhyme) can be based on five teaching bases of objectives, namely linguistics, psychology/affective, cognitive, cultural, and social. Referring to the facts above, the researchers believe that nursery rhymes can be used as a medium for the formation and development of children's character because naturally children place nursery rhymes as activities that they usually do everyday. Therefore, education activists must be able to choose the right nursery rhymes because these nursery rhymes can be authentic inputs that can develop children's character.

In acquainting English to young learners, the nursery rhymes are given so the students feel that they were singing and playing. Indirectly, they also did the learning process. This strategy is very nice because they are singing and playing while learning. The process could be more maximum when the nursery rhymes were combined with the body movement and video. They were so enthusiastic when they practiced to sing and move their bodies together according to the nursery rhymes' meaning and the video. In this process, they activated their some of body parts because of audio visual learning model. By using video, it can reveal the language barriers. Learning pronunciation barriers include how to pronounce vowels, difficulty distinguishing words that are nearly identical, difficulty distinguishing in a cluster, difficulties in producing consonants at the point of articulation, heredity and social factors also contribute to learning difficulties, and they were surprised when they were in college studying phonetic symbols because they had never received a pronunciation lesson, about which sound is correct to say in a word, of which they were shocked when they were in college studying phonetic symbols because they had never received (Agustina & Erzad, 2020, p. 49).

The children or young learners have different characteristics from adults in behaviour. Thus, in terms of learning children also have characteristics that are not the same as adults. Characteristics of children's learning are phenomena that must be understood and used as a reference in planning and implementing learning for young children. The characteristics of children's learning in studying English are: Children learn through play; Children learn by building knowledge; Children learn naturally; Children learn best if what they learn considers all aspects of development, meaningful, interesting, and functional; and Child-centered learning syntax

At PAUD Halimatus Sa'diyah, child or student-centered learning is applied so the learning process focused on the students. The planning stage, the work phase, and the review stage were the three key stages of the teaching and learning process. The teacher provides the children the opportunity to plan their activities during the planning stage. For example, the teacher may supply play equipment such as wooden blocks, fruit models, transportation equipment, narrative books, and drawing tools. The second was the work stage (work time). Following the selection of activities, the children are divided into groups based on the activities chosen. In this stage, the youngster begins to work, play, or solve difficulties in accordance with the previously established plan. The teacher walks alongside students, offers support, and is ready to offer guidance if necessary. Review / recall was the final stage. After the students have completed their activities, they are given the opportunity to share their firsthand experiences. The teacher tries to get the kids to express their emotions in a healthy way at this time.

A child's need is to play. Playing is an activity that connects with a child's world and serves a range of purposes, including the development of physical motor, cognitive, affective, and social skills, among others. It will go through a procedure that leads to the development of human talents by playing. There are three key processes of learning methods through play that are implemented there: pre-playing stage, play stage, and closure stage.

The pre-training stage consists of two types of preparatory activities: preparatory activities for students in carrying out play activities and preparations for materials and equipment that are ready to be used.

Student preparation activities consist of (1) The teacher explains the purpose of the play activities to the students, (2) the teacher explains the rules that must be followed in the play activities, (3) the teacher assigns tasks to each child, such as building a palace, building towers, etc., (4) the teacher explains what each child has to do in doing their work; and (5) the teacher prepares materials and equipment needed, such as a puzzle, balls, and lego pieces.

The playing stage consists of the following steps: (1) all children go to the designated play area; (2) under the supervision of the teacher, game participants begin their assigned tasks; (3) after the activity is completed, each child reorganizes the game's materials and equipment; and (4) children wash their hands.

Meanwhile, activities in the closing stage or concluding stage of the learning strategy through play include: (1) attracting attention and arousing children's interest in important aspects of building something, such as reviewing geometric shapes formed by the child, etc.; (2) connecting the child's recent experience in playing with other experiences, such as at home; (3) demonstrating important aspects of working in groups; and (4) emphasizing the importance of working in groups.

In teaching English, the researchers found some students who are so enthusiastic to learn English. Although they just kept silent when they listened the nursery rhymes, they paid attention more. After repeating several times, finally they raised their hand, asked a question or asked to sing a nursery rhyme.

There were seven nursery rhymes taught to the students. They were (1) Good Morning Everybody, (2) The Finger Family, (3) Colors, (4) Baby Shark, (5) Animals Song, (6) Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes, and (7) If You're Happy and you Know It (Clap Your Hands). From those nursery rhymes, the students are expected to be able to have great

character because the content of the nursery rhymes teach the students about the social life and education. The nursery rhymes were selected because they cover character education. Nursery rhymes must be evaluated in terms of their content's relevance to children's lives and age appropriateness, as well as if they give material for encouraging conversation and exploration of values, as well as solutions to a variety of problems that children may face in their everyday lives (Prosic-santovac, 2015).

In this case, the nursery rhymes become a medium for introducing new languages, as well as a medium for strengthening grammar and vocabulary. The nursery rhymes also presents a language that students already recognize in a new and fun form. The students' learning of English should be made engaging and fun (Suciati, 2021, p. 205). Its preparation necessitates more effort and time than traditional ones. The nursery rhyme also allows for a natural and pleasant repetition of language. They can be used to develop all language skills integratively, including improving students' pronunciation skills. Second, it is an affective/psychological resource. Besides being fun, the nursery rhyme is also able to motivate students while fostering a positive attitude towards English. Nursery rhymes are not scary or threatening for students. Even they can help increase student confidence. The nursery rhymes must teach the character education as well. As stated by Hidayati et al. (2021, p. 306) that song (or *dendang*) can be one of media to develop children's character education.

As proof that they have mastered something in English, students can proudly raise their hands and sing an English nursery rhyme in front of their friends. Third, nursery rhyme is cognitive resource. They help to make memory, concentration and coordination. Students become more sensitive to the rhymes as a tool to interpret meaning. Fourth, the nursery rhyme can be a cultural resource and a social resource. Students exposed to the nursery rhyme system exhibited numerous beneficial characteristics and values, including empathy, the ability to listen, community collaboration and aid, accountability, and self-confidence (Hery & Arshad, 2020, p. 223).

Based on the result, the researcher found that there were seven nursery rhymes used at Halimatus Sa'diyah playgroup. Meanwhile, Lulu' Hidayati's research found three kinds of nursery rhyme used by teacher at Cordova course. Those are finger play and action rhyme, riddles, and counting rhyme. The teacher applied nursery rhyme which involved several steps, they were: the teacher gave the students a piece of paper of the Nursery rhyme lyric; teacher asks the students to repeat the lyric after the teacher; teacher show the nursery rhyme and the students listen carefully about the video; The teacher give the example of sings a nursery rhyme; the teacher asks the students to sing together; and the teacher asks the students to sings by themselves. There were three strategies or "Tips" in using nursery rhyme done by the teacher in English for young learner at Cordova course, those were classroom technique, using simple language, and the assessment. The similarity of this program with the previous research is the use of nursery rhymes to teach young learners. The nursery rhymes were given to 5th graders at Cordova course. Meanwhile, in this program the nursery rhymes were given to younger children in playgroup.

The similar research conducted in 2015 by Endang Fauziati also employed nursery rhymes to teach English for young learners. The study was entitled "Using Nursery Rhymes and Songs to Teach English to Young Children". This research presents some basic principles of language learning, characteristic of children and classroom techniques, especially nursery rhymes. There are several results from this research. First, some basic learning principles for teaching children discussed in this paper were taken from Piaget and Vygotsky. Second, the basic characteristics of children are children love playing, talk about the 'here and now', and understand meaning better when they see the objects. The last, the suitable media for teaching English to young children are rhymes and songs because both are suitable with the characteristics of young children.

Because the day-care institution is still new, it needs a lot of improvement. There are several aspects that need to be considered. Those aspects are the facilities, learning media,

programs, curriculum, and also teachers' competence. The institution still needs many supports from DWP and even IAIN Kudus. The supports or helps can be varied. Some lecturers help this institution by giving various learning media made by the students of IAIN Kudus. The rector of IAIN Kudus supports it by giving a permission to hold a learning process in the area of the campus. And, there are many other kinds of help or contribution needed and must be given. One of them is the English learning for the students. Because the students are categorized as young learners, so the media or form of learning English must be entertaining and fun for them.

Learning English becomes a good habit because they are accustomed to learning. It also happens in PAUD Halimatus Sa'diyah IAIN Kudus. Basically, this school formally gives English lesson to the students on Thursday. However, English learning is actually applied everyday. The teachers use some instructions and questions using English everyday so they will not forget because the young children need repetition. For having the effective teaching and learning process, the media in teaching the young children is needed and helpful, in this case is video. As it is stated by Ratno & Kusbiantari (2021, p. 14) that visual audio media can improve the children verbal language competence.

Learning media in the learning process is used to convey messages / materials in order to achieve the expected learning goals. Media in the learning process has two roles, namely: 1. Media as a tool in the learning process, the media is used to explain teaching materials so that they are easily understood by students so that learning objectives can be achieved. Media as a source of learning that is as a source of material used in the learning process. Songs are an effective "tool" for helping students learn English, and nursery rhymes, in particular, are thought to be able to encourage pupils while learning English. Nursery rhymes can also be considered an important aspect of learning English since they teach children to be more sensitive to sound. Nursery rhymes can also add excitement and life to the classroom. Teachers will be glad and excited to teach nursery rhymes to youngsters who enjoy them.

D. Conclusion

For learning English, young learners needed the fun atmosphere so they can enjoy the learning process. It was like playing while learning. One of the alternatives was by using nursery rhymes. After conducting the case study research, there were three conclusions. First, the acquaintance of young learners English through nursery rhymes at Halimatus Sa'diyah playgroup should be done by considering the nursery rhymes content, students' readiness, and class atmosphere. Second, the criteria of nursery rhymes that suited the students of Halimatus Sa'diyah playgroup were the nursery rhymes that taught the character education. Third, the strengths in acquainting English to young learners through nursery rhymes at Halimatus Sa'diyah playgroup were the commitment among the managers/organizers, teachers and parents and the high awareness that English was important. Meanwhile, the challenges were low teacher's pedagogical competency, facilities, curriculum/material, and non-English school or living environment. Furthermore, the next studies on the same topic were expected to be able to measure or analyze within a broader context. The researchers recognized that this study was based on a few basic studies on the same topic and they wanted to learn more about the implementation, criteria of appropriate nursery rhymes, strengths and the challenges of teaching English to young learners by employing nursery rhymes. The researchers recommended the further research to use quantitative and qualitative approaches. It can be one of the recommendations for obtaining broader and more explicit results. Another study option is an ethnographic observation study which can be utilized to learn more about a culture.

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