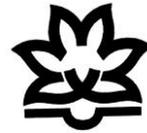




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## “Listen, do, repeat, understand and remember”: Teaching English to very young children in Aceh

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### ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated the methods used in teaching English vocabulary to very young children (i.e. toddlers) at a bilingual school in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Not much research has been published on teaching English to toddlers in the EFL context; therefore, this research is important as the results can become additional input to L2 teachers who teach very young children because by understanding their conditions of learners, teachers can help them reach their full potential as language learners. An observation sheet and a set of interview questions were used to collect data from an English teacher. There was only one teacher who became the participant because the school under study is thus far the only school that provides an English learning environment for children as young as toddlers in the city of Banda Aceh. The class was observed for three class meetings. The results showed that of the four teaching methods observed, the most commonly employed method was Total Physical Response (TPR), followed by Natural Approach (NA), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Suggestopedia (SG) as the least. Furthermore, based on the interview with the teacher, it was indicated that TPR and NA were more appropriate for teaching the toddlers English vocabulary. Through TPR, the very young children demonstrated their understanding of commands by responding with simple answers or gestures. In NA, they were situated in a natural environment and not prompted to speak until they felt ready to do so. Additionally, the teacher used no specific textbooks because music, pictures, and authentic materials procured an immense role in supporting the activities in the classroom.

**Keywords:** language teaching methods; vocabulary; toddlers; Aceh

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## Introduction

Indonesia is a multiethnic country with thousands of local languages and a standard national language, Indonesian. Some Indonesian people also speak international languages, one of which is English (Sari & Yusuf, 2009). English is gaining more attention in Indonesia due to its global status, and the number of private schools that teach in both English and Indonesian is increasing. These bilingual schools are even available for children at a very young age across the country, starting from toddlers.

Some parents assume that, if young children are still in the process of mastering their first language, learning a foreign language, or L2, will bring too many challenges (Prieto, 2009). However, research conducted by Prieto (2009) on dual language acquisition (DLA) indicated that infants and toddlers do have the capability and intelligence to learn more than one language at the same time. Furthermore, Yusuf (2009) provides evidence that children have the ability to differentiate the different languages spoken to them from infancy. Several studies have shown that children's ability to learn an L2 is dependent on the teaching methods throughout the learning (Arikan & Taraf, 2010; Cameron, 2001; Er, 2014). However, there have been no studies exploring the teaching methods employed for very young children (or in this case, the toddlers) in EFL countries, especially in Indonesia, and this study intends to address the research gap.

This research is designed to study the teaching methods used by an L2 teacher in a private bilingual school in Indonesia, particularly, English vocabulary for bilingual toddlers (who have parents speaking both Acehnese and Indonesian). Swan (2013) says that the relevance of contextual knowledge enables teachers to assess their learners' needs, and the native/non-native speaker dichotomy does not really matter to the teachers; their professionalism lies more on how to ensure that their students gain the best learning and teaching environments. Accordingly, as English is treated as a foreign language in Indonesia, this study aims to understand how non-native speaking teachers make English learning work for children from a very early age (i.e. toddlers). This research was conducted in Aceh, a province in Sumatra, where children grow up with Acehnese as their mother tongue and Indonesian as their national language. Children use a local dialect of Acehnese at home, with family and friends, but use Indonesian when they learn to read and write. Later when they attend school, their lessons will be taught in Indonesian. To understand how L2 is currently being taught to toddlers in Aceh, the research question for this study is: (1) what methods does the L2 teacher use to teach English vocabulary to non-native speaking toddlers? It is expected that this study can benefit L2 teachers who teach English to very young children, by providing advice on the methods that they can employ to develop the children's English vocabulary. This research is also expected to provide more insights to L2 teachers to understand the children's learning conditions to help them reach their full potential as language learners.

## Review of Literature

### *Age and Foreign Language Learning*

Numerous researchers (Cameron, 2001; Er, 2014; Lightbown, 2008; López & Méndez, 2004; Paradis, Kirova & Dachysyn, 2009) have shown that children can learn more than one language starting from their early years. Some have also shared their personal experiences in raising their own children as multilingual from infancy and the outcomes show that their language development has not been hindered (Pearson, 2008; Saunders, 1988; Yusuf, 2009). Knowing L2 has proved beneficial for children as they grow older. Being multilingual can benefit them in areas such as communication, culture, cognitive behaviour, character, education and economy (Baker, 2000; Saunders, 1988).

Lightbown (2008) further asserted that the number of years a child is involved in language also determines their fluency. Another view is that very young children are natural sponges when it comes to acquiring or learning languages; they are ready to learn whatever languages are taught to them. This idea lies at the heart of the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH). Penfield and Roberts (1959) and Lenneberg (1967) were the first to propose that there was a critical period for language acquisition (van Boxtel, 2005). CPH states that young children can learn a second language effectively before puberty because their brains are still able to use mechanisms that assisted first language acquisition (Cameron, 2001). In terms of proficiency, children are able to speak with a near native or native-like accent that can never be achieved by adults. Gilakjani (2012) and Lightbown and Spada (1999) have provided evidence both for and against CPH. These researchers raise the idea that determining factors need to be counted in language learning, such as the different needs, motivations, and contexts of different groups of learners. They suggest that when learning L2 to achieve native-like proficiency, learning from an early age is beneficial. Whereas, if the aim is to accomplish only communicative ability then there is less need to start at an early age. The activity of the brain during language processing reflects the difference between these goals since different parts of the brain seize different roles for language recall and activation between the early bilingual children and those who begin later at the age of 7 or 8 (Cameron, 2001). Gilakjani (2012) further identified some factors affecting L2 fluency (in his study, the L2 is English), specifically pronunciation. Gilakjani (2012) found that learners can achieve a native-like accent even if they start to learn English after puberty. This is attained by having pertinent attitude, motivation, instruction and exposure.

### *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary for Young Children*

The characteristics of young learners have been summarized by Slattery and Willis (2001), who argued that children acquire language in different ways based on their age. Students under the age of 7, known as very young learners, acquire language unconsciously through the language exposure around them by hearing and playing. Meanwhile, 7-12-year-old students, known as young learners, are already able to read and write the language consciously.

Muñoz (2017) says that selecting the appropriate and suitable vocabulary according to the level of the students is a great effort for every language teacher. Nevertheless, to teach vocabulary to young children who are learning L2, Llach and Gómez (2007) propose that since children understand concrete aspects better than abstract ones, words taught should have concrete references, such as things (for examples: bed, blanket, table, chair, etc.). They also suggest that it is convenient to introduce words whose meanings can be inferred with actions, body language, and drawings. The number of words very young children typically know is about 100 to 300 words (Gopnik, Meltzoff & Kuhl, 1999). Then, it is important as well that they are given words that cover their actual needs and interests (i.e. real context situations), such as those that are typically used in their daily life and activities. This helps the children in comprehending the words without the need to translate them into their mother tongues. To reinforce the vocabulary being learnt, they further explain that it can be done through participative games, role-playing and dramatizations, repetition and imitations, and physical activities (body movements).

#### *English Vocabulary Teaching Methodology*

A number of English vocabulary-teaching methods and approaches have been proposed by experts, but in this paper, the methods specifically applicable for young learners in teaching L2 were considered. López and Méndez (2004) described teaching methods such as Suggestopedia, The Silent Way, Community Language Learning, Total Physical Response, and Communicative Approach or Natural Approach, which have been the basis for previous research on young children's L2 acquisition. Accordingly, this research focuses on how these methods were employed by early childhood teachers.

In the 1960s, Asher developed Total Physical Response (hereafter, TPR) (Asher, 1977), which includes learning by command. This method emphasizes activities that involve body movements or physical responses known as modeling. Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 92) explain that "...vocabulary items are selected not according to their frequency of need or use in target language situations, but according to the situations in which they can be used in the classroom and ease with which they can be learned". Typically, there is no particular material used for beginner students in TPR. The authentic materials are used in succeeding stages of learning as students make improvements in their learning. These may include pictures, objects, slides and word charts.

Communicative Language Teaching (hereafter, CLT) was introduced in the late 1960s (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The goal of CLT is to improve students' communicative competences. These competences include:

"...knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes functions, knowing how to vary the use of language according to the setting and the participants, knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts, and knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge" (Richards, 2006, p. 4).

These competences are stimulated from functional and social activities (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) such as the use of pair work, role-plays, group work, and project work. The materials used in CLT teaching are authentic materials (Richards, 2006).

In the 1970s, Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell developed Natural Approach (hereafter, NA) (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). The concentration of NA is on the significance of vocabulary (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). The method is designed to help beginners become intermediates and teaching is divided into a three-stage category, namely pre-production stage, early-production stage and speech-emergent phase (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). NA leads the teacher to set the teaching and learning situation as learners acquire their first language. In NA, teachers are challenged to offer students the opportunities for both language-learning practices. Therefore, teachers are viewed as the primary sources of comprehensible input for learners. Thus, these learners are not forced to speak the target language until they feel ready and materials are mostly taken from authentic sources (i.e. real-world objects) rather than textbooks (Brown, 2001).

Suggestopedia (hereafter, SG) is a method developed by Lozanov in the late 1970s (Lozanov, 1978). Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 142) argued that “the most conspicuous characteristics of SG are the decoration, furniture, and arrangement of the classroom, the use of music, and the authoritative behavior of the teacher”. Profound concentration is used to enhance learning and memory, with a focus on the meaning conveyed through communicative tasks. A prominent feature is the use of music in the learning environment (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). This method is based on the understanding that the human brain can process vast materials given appropriate conditions for learning. Music is believed to relax learners and create enjoyment in the teaching and learning environment. Furthermore, music experiences support and promote growth in the various developmental domains of children’s early learning, including literacy and language learning (Parlakian & Lerner, 2010; Yuliana, 2003).

Nevertheless, few works have been published on the teaching methods used by L2 teachers to teach English to very young children, or toddlers in this research, in EFL countries. Many have published research on teaching EFL to children, among them are research that focused on kindergarten students (Er, 2014) and there are also that focused on fourth grader students (Arikan & Taraf, 2010) in Turkey. Er (2014) collected data from 32 kindergarten teachers in Turkey through questionnaires and interviews, and revealed that these teachers found TPR to be the most effective method for the children. The activities included mimes, gestures, videos, and other physical activities and were considered easier to prepare compared to other activities such as storytelling, role-playing and drama. The TPR “full of actions” (Er, 2014, p. 833) activities were more appealing to the children and they generated more reactions compared to less preferred activities. Another research on fourth grade students in Turkey also found that these students perform better in grammar and vocabulary after they were taught using authentic animated cartoons compared to those students who were taught using the traditional grammar-based syllabus (Arikan & Taraf, 2010). Referring to the literature, authentic animated cartoons are also considered to be part of the TPR method. Considering that not much research has looked into the teaching methods to very young children (i.e. toddlers), this study intends to fill in this gap.

## Method

Our study was conducted in a bilingual pre-school in Banda Aceh, Kiddos English School (hereafter, KES). KES is a day care, playgroup, and kindergarten. For classes (excluding day care), this school provides three class categories based on the age of the children. The classes are Toddler Class (18 months – 2.5 years old), Playgroup Class (2.5 – 4 years old), and Kindergarten class (5 – 6 years old). Each class is handled by two L2 teachers, the Main Teacher (MT) and the Assistant Teacher (AT). Both teachers have obtained their Bachelor's degree in Education. However, the main teacher is more senior in experience of teaching (has taught more than three years in KES), whilst the assistant teacher has just started his/her teaching career. Therefore, main teachers take more responsibility for English teaching in the classroom.

KES is thus far the only school in the city that provides an English learning environment for children as young as toddlers. The teaching and learning process in KES mostly occur in English, and the L2 teacher and students are expected to communicate in English as much as possible. The learning process is also designed in as fun and educative way as possible. They learn through games, role-play, and singing where the students are actively involved in the activities. They use the curriculum (*KTSP Curriculum*) provided by the Ministry of Education (*Direktorat PAUD Kemendikbud RI*) for pre-schools.

### *Participants*

This study focused on the Toddler Class, which comprised six toddler students. This class was selected because this study investigates how the teacher introduces English to these very young children. At home, they are exposed to Acehnese and Indonesian from their family members. Since there is only one toddler class in KES, the participant of this research is only one teacher, who is the main teacher for this class. Her pseudo-name is "Nora". She had given us consent to conduct this research in her classroom, and so had the parents of the six toddlers involved. From Monday to Friday, the school starts from 08.30 to 12.00. The various activities for this class are shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Daily Activities in Toddler Class*

| Daily Activities of Toddler Class in KES |  |
|--|--|
| Time                                     | Activity   |
| 08.30 am – 09.00 am                      | Outdoor playing  |
| 09.00 am – 10.00 am                      | Circle time and learning activity                                  |
| 10.00 am – 10.30 am                      | Snack break  |
| 10.30 am – 11.00 am                      | Outdoor / Indoor playing   |
| 11.00 am – 12.00 pm                      | Learning activities at different Centers                           |
| 12.00 pm                                 | Morning session ends (outdoor playing whilst waiting for pick-ups) |

In the learning activity, the children receive new materials for the day and they learn at different centers. A center is the specific classroom they enter based on the subject being taught. For instance, to study arts and music, the students enter the Arts and Music Center. The centers available in KES are Arts and Music, Religion, Role Playing, Blocks, Nature and Gymnasium.

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

The data for our research was collected through participant observation and an interview with Nora. The purpose of examining the participant in her natural teaching environment was to better understand her “ways of being” (Zulfikar, 2014, p. 377) while teaching the toddlers. Schmuck (1997) states that observation in a classroom can assist researchers in discerning unspoken expressions of their participants (i.e. teacher and students), interactions between them and how they communicate with each other, and examine the time used for tasks or activities conducted. Therefore, the concentration of observation in this research offered us direct access to the happenings under consideration in the classroom. Furthermore, the observation was conducted for three school days in a row, Monday to Wednesday, from 8.30 a.m. until 12.00 p.m. each day. An observation guide was used to collect data. This was done to observe Nora during her teaching process in Toddler Class. This guide was adapted from Nunan (1989, as cited in Brown, 2001) (see Table 2), with a concentration on the aspects of teaching methods in language teaching.

The teaching process comprises three phases of classroom activities: opening, main activity, and closing. Nora’s methods in teaching vocabulary were the main focus of the observation. The fourth author was the observer in the classroom. When Nora was teaching, she would tick the items that Nora performed in class. Meanwhile, the third author sat in a corner as a non-participant observer, and took extra notes on the situation in the classroom. These methods were employed because Nora did not give consent for video or audio recording of the classroom activities. Later, in analyzing the observation data, the results were cross-checked from the observation guide with the results from field notes before finalizing the observation guide.

Finally, an interview with Nora was conducted to further gain more information on her methods of teaching. Berry (1999, p. 1) explained that “in-depth interviewing, also known as unstructured interviewing, is a type of interview which researchers use to elicit information in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewee’s point of view or situation”. A semi-structured interview of eight main questions was prepared; they were based on our observation guide which included the aspects of language used, methods of learning, objectives of teaching (i.e. English vocabulary), syllabus used, activity types in the classroom, learner roles, teacher roles, and the roles of materials used in teaching. The interview, which lasted for about an hour, was done in the school during the afternoon after the third class meeting was finished for the day. It was audio recorded and the interview was carried out in Indonesian. The recording was later transcribed and translated into English. In analyzing the interview data, the framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was adopted: data reduction (the process of selecting, simplifying and transforming data from our transcriptions), data display (organizing and compressing information that permits conclusion drawing), and conclusion drawing/verification (developing

conclusions that can be verified through references to our data collection). The results are presented descriptively to enable a more meaningful presentation of the data.

## Results and Discussion

Our observation guide related to the language teaching methodologies proposed by experts in Nunan (1989), as cited in Brown (2001). The result can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2  
*The Observation Checklist Form of the Methods Used in the Classroom*

| No. | Aspects            | Characteristics  | Code | Yes | No |
|-----|--------------------|--|------|-----|----|
| 1   | Theory of language | Basically a structuralist, grammar-based view of language.   | (a)  | ✓   |    |
|     |                    | The essence of language is meaning. Vocabulary, not grammar is the heart of language.  | (b)  | ✓   |    |
|     |                    | Rather conventional, although memorization of whole meaningful texts is recommended.   | (c)  |     | ✓  |
|     |                    | Language is a system for the expression of meaning; primary function – interaction and communication   | (d)  | ✓   |    |
| 2   | Theory of learning | L2 learning is the same as L1 learning; comprehension before production, is ‘imprinted’ through carrying out commands (right-brain functioning); reduction of stress.                                | (a)  | ✓   |    |
|     |                    | There are two ways of L2 language development: ‘acquisition’ – a natural subconscious process and ‘learning’ – a conscious process. Learning cannot lead to acquisition.                             | (b)  | ✓   |    |
|     |                    | Learning occurs through suggestion, when learners are deeply relaxed state. Baroque music is used to induce this state.  | (c)  |     | ✓  |
|     |                    | Activities involving real communication; carrying out meaningful tasks; and using language which is meaningful to the learner promote learning.  | (d)  | ✓   |    |
| 3   | Objectives         | Teach oral proficiency to produce learners who can communicate uninhibitedly and intelligibly with native speakers.  | (a)  | ✓   |    |
|     |                    | Designed to give beginner and intermediate class learners basic communicative skills. Four broad areas; basic personal communicative skills (oral/written); academic learning skills (oral/written). | (b)  |     | ✓  |
|     |                    | To deliver advanced conversational competence quickly. Learners are required to master prodigious list of vocabulary pairs, although the goal is understanding and not memorization.                 | (c)  |     | ✓  |
|     |                    | Objectives will reflect the needs of the learner; they will include functional skills as well as linguistic objectives   | (d)  |     | ✓  |
| 4   | Syllabus           | Sentence-based syllabus with grammatical and lexical criteria being primary, but focus on meaning not form.  | (a)  | ✓   |    |
|     |                    | Based on selection of communicative activities and topics derived from learner needs.  | (b)  | ✓   |    |
|     |                    | Ten unit courses consisting of 1,200-word dialogues graded by vocabulary and grammar   | (c)  |     | ✓  |

|   |                    |   |     |   |   |
|---|--------------------|---|-----|---|---|
|   |                    | Will include some/all of the following: structures, functions, notions, themes, tasks. Ordering will be guided by learner needs.  | (d) |   | ✓ |
| 5 | Activity types     | Imperative drills to elicit physical actions.   | (a) | ✓ |   |
|   |                    | Activities allowing comprehensible input, about things in the here-and-now. Focus on meaning not form.  | (b) | ✓ |   |
|   |                    | Initiatives, question and answer, role-play, listening exercises under deep relaxation.   | (c) | ✓ |   |
|   |                    | Engage learners in communication; involve processes such as information sharing, negotiation of meaning, and interaction.   | (d) | ✓ |   |
| 6 | Learner roles      | Listener and performer, little influence over the content of learning.  | (a) | ✓ |   |
|   |                    | Should not try to learn language in the usual sense, but should try to lose themselves in activities involving meaningful communication.  | (b) | ✓ |   |
|   |                    | Must maintain a passive state and allow materials to work on them (rather than vice versa).   | (c) |   | ✓ |
|   |                    | Learner as negotiator, interactor, giving as well as tasking.   | (d) |   | ✓ |
| 7 | Teacher roles      | Active and direct role; 'the director of a stage play' with students as actor.  | (a) | ✓ |   |
|   |                    | The teacher is the primary source of comprehensible input. Must create positive low-anxiety climate. Must choose and orchestrate a rich mixture of classroom activities.                    | (b) | ✓ |   |
|   |                    | To create situations in which the learner is most suggestible and present material in a way most likely to encourage positive reception and retention. Must exude authority and confidence. | (c) |   |   |
|   |                    | Facilitator of the communication, process, participants' tasks, and texts; needs analyst, counselor, and process manager.   | (d) |   | ✓ |
| 8 | Roles of materials | No basic text; materials and media have an important role later. Initially voice, action, and gestures are sufficient.  | (a) | ✓ |   |
|   |                    | Materials come from realia rather than textbooks. Primary aim is to promote comprehension and communication.  | (b) | ✓ |   |
|   |                    | Consists of texts, tapes, classroom fixtures, and music. Text should have force, literally quality, and interesting characters.   | (c) |   | ✓ |
|   |                    | Primary role in promoting communicative language use; task-based materials; authentic.  | (d) | ✓ |   |

Notes: (a) Total Physical Response, (b) Natural Approach, (c) Suggestopedia, and (d) Communicative Language Teaching

Table 2 shows that all methods were included in the teaching-learning process, and the methods used from the most to the least were TPR, NA, CLT and SG. This is similar to the findings by Er (2014) who noted that kindergarten teachers in Turkey also found TPR to be mostly employed and useful in teaching very young learners.

The first interview question had centered on the theory of language learning in the classroom. The interview response showed that it was compatible with the observation result in which TPR

was more used in the class compared to the other methods. Accordingly, Nora stated that in Toddler Class, English was not focused on grammar but rather more on the use of the language in words, simple phrases and sentences in daily communication. Similarly, Richards and Rodgers (2001) argue that TPR is a technique built on the coordination of speech and action. Very young children are not likely to know reading and writing; therefore, they tend to learn through physical activities. Grammar in class was taught indirectly. This way of teaching grammar was required in TPR as well as NA. Nora explained:

N: *We do not focus on the structure or grammar of the language formally, if we teach them that now, they will be confused. At this age, we speak (to them) directly every day in simple sentences and simple words. They will listen, do, repeat, understand and remember. As the proverb says, "practice makes perfect".*

The second interview question asked about the theory of learning, and Nora said that English in the classroom mostly occurred through commands. From the observation guide, this is related to TPR theory of language. In TPR, verbs become the main linguistic aspect in language use and learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). As for these very young children, verbs were used in commands related to their everyday activities; as Nora illustrated below:

N: *Yes, absolutely! As I said, the command is given every day to the students. Example, rubbish, we ask them to throw it away by saying, "Throw to the bin please!" The students understand what we asked them without translating it into Indonesian. Sometimes, the child will respond to it in Indonesian, "You do it, Miss!" Then, we respond back in English, "No! Be responsible, you have to do it by yourself". So when they command back to us the things we should do, we reinforce the command back to them. Therefore, without the help of translation, the students got the point of the instruction; they just do not know how to reply in long (sentences of) English, yet.*

Besides, the use of TPR, the class also showed the application of NA, which viewed vocabulary as the most significant aspect in language learning. NA occurred in the teacher's emphasis on the toddlers' comprehensible input in the target language (i.e. English) by talking to them in the target language. The activities were also adapted from the earlier methods, such as TPR. Therefore, command-based activities were also conducted in the classroom.

Another characteristic of NA is that the learners are not forced to speak until they feel ready (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), although teachers do hope that the children respond to their commands and questions with short answers. This statement is supported by Nora in the following excerpt:

N: *As I said, make it as a habit. Because when they listen to us every day, even though they do not respond to it, they will get used to it. For example, when we say, "Sit down nicely". They know the meaning of the command. Or when we say, "Line up properly!" After a week or two, the toddlers started to answer, "Yes, Miss!" or "Okay!" or "(I am) Ready, Miss!"*

The third interview question solicited the objective of teaching English to the toddlers. Nora said that KES is a bilingual school which aims to assist very young children, to learn L2. In view of that, the school starts this by introducing words to facilitate toddlers' learning with simple conversations. Nora revealed:

N: *Our school is a bilingual school, in Indonesian and English. So we have to speak in both languages to the children. Again...we don't bear many people speak English in Aceh. So to start speaking English, the children must start with vocabulary...simple words. By knowing more words, it will help them later to speak in the language.*

In Aceh, English is a foreign language and therefore people do not use this language in their daily communication. It is usually used in the media, such as television, radio broadcast, and certain newspapers and billboard advertisements. To familiarize the children with English, the teachers in KES try to communicate with them in English; however, Indonesian is also used to increase the children's understanding in conversations. This is in line with Slattery and Willis (2001) who say listening to languages in their environment is one of the ways children acquire languages unconsciously.

The fourth interview question was about the syllabus used. In this case, the lesson plan was examined to support our data. It is common that each school has its own rules of what to include in the lesson plan. The lesson plan in Toddler Class, namely *SKH (Satuan Kegiatan Harian)* or *the Unit of Daily Teaching* was set by the teacher for one term. An example of a lesson plan of a day's teaching is shown in Table 3.

Table 3  
*Lesson Plan*

| Items                                | Illustration  |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Goal(s)                              | Understand some words related to water.   |
| Objectives:                          |   |
| • Terminal lesson objectives         | Know words: bath, milk, juice, swim and pool.   |
| • Enabling objectives                | Can perform how to bath, drink and swim.  |
| Materials & equipment                | Ball, cups, and flash cards about water, swimming suits, pool.  |
| Procedure:                           |   |
| • Opening                            | Opening (Circle Time)<br>1. Make a line to say <i>do'a</i> (prayer) before entering the class.  |
| • A set of activities and techniques | Main Activity<br>Giving Information<br>1. Reviewing previous material<br>- What is your name?<br>- How are you today? (Happy, sad, and hungry song)<br>2. Introducing the theme: Water, Air, Fire and Soil<br>Sub theme: Water<br>3. Give some words related to water.<br>4. Perform actions of bathing, drinking and swimming.<br>5. Play at the pool. |
| • Closure                            | 1. Students greet, shake hand and say good bye (social and moral ability).  |
| Evaluation                           |   |
| Extra-Class Work                     |   |

Table 3 shows that there is no meaningful evaluation or test/exam given after the class ended, and no extra class work is given to take home. Considering the age of the learner as very young children, Nora said that these two items were not necessary as the learning objectives were centered on the classroom activities. As shown in the observation guide, their syllabus focused more on meaning, not form, and on communicative activities relevant to the learners' needs. At the end of the school term, the school does provide a simple assessment to the children in the form of a one-page essay. It includes the development and setback of the child within the items in the Lesson Plan. The report for each child is given to his or her parents during the end term parent-teacher meeting. When the children's comprehension on the meaning of words gradually shows improvement, she believed that the functional sentences would later take place in the classroom. Furthermore, from the lesson plan, we can see that she had listed social language ability as a learning objective, where the children are expected to be able to socially interact with others.

Nora explained that since the toddlers themselves were still acquiring Indonesian and also their mother tongue, Acehnese, the type of words focused on the things that were common to the toddlers. She added the familiarity to English starts with simple words, such as names of things around them and describing feelings (e.g. sad, happy, hungry, etc.). They are from objects around them and situations that these children face every day. This is evidence of the TPR method where words are taught based on the classroom situations and learners' needs. This is as Gopnik, Meltzoff and Kuhl (1999) pointed out that vocabulary learning should cover those used and found in the learners' daily life and activities. Nora stated:

N: *When the children are playing with the toys, we ask them directly, "What is that?" If they do not know the name of the things, we tell them directly, for example, "This is a block... block. Can you say, block?" It is more to the things found around them.*

The CLT method was found to play a part in the language learning in the classroom. In CLT language is seen as a tool of communication. Nora explained:

N: *We learn more in circle time. For example, we make a big circle as a start, then we ask each one, "How are you?", "What day is today?", and sing a song together in the circle...and we try our best to always use English during this time, in giving commands...in our communication with the children.*

Nora also said that to develop the toddlers' vocabulary, the words used were repeated daily, according to situations. The exposure towards the target language was continuously conducted by Nora in their daily communication in the classroom. This continuity is important to provide for the very young children's bilingualism (Prieto, 2009). This activity is supported by TPR learning theory, which emphasizes sequences of stimuli to get responses. As told by Nora in the following excerpt:

N: *As we know, children will easily memorize if we often say the words. So, to make it as a habit, for instance, on sitting properly from, "Sit down, please", we keep repeating the same phrase for the act. Listening to it once is not enough. But the more they listen to it, the better they will remember it.*

The fifth interview question enquired about the types of activities conducted in class. During the classroom observation, the main activities highlighted during the teaching and learning process were giving instruction, questioning, prohibiting, and singing. These activities were found to significantly assist the teacher in enhancing the children's vocabulary day by day. Instructions were based on the activities which occurred in the classroom such as the instructions for queuing, eating, drinking milk, cleaning up, throwing rubbish to the bin, and apologizing. Short and simple instructions were used by Nora to familiarize the toddlers with the phrases. They were also taught how to respond to the instructions. The teacher's instructions and children's responses are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4  
*Illustration of the Teacher's Instructions and Children's Responses*

| Activities                     | Instruction words   | Students responses         |
|--------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| Queuing                        | Stand up properly!<br>Line up properly!   | Yes, Miss!<br>Ready, Miss! |
| Eating                         | Sit down properly!<br>Let's say <i>do'a</i> (prayer) first!<br>Raise your hand! |                            |
| Cleaning up toys after playing | Clean up!<br>Tidy up!   |                            |
| Drinking milk                  | Lay down!   |                            |
| Throwing rubbish to the bin    | Throw to the bin!   |                            |
| Apologizing                    | Say "sorry", please!  | I'm sorry!                 |

Meanwhile, the questioning activity was conducted at the beginning of every lesson when the children sang 'Make a Big Circle' and then sat in a circle. Nora then started asking toddlers questions such as asking about their day (i.e. "*How are you?*") and led them to answer "*I'm fine, thank you!*" or "*I'm not fine because...*" and the children would give a simple answer such as "*I am sad*", "*I am hungry*", etc.), the name of the day, the date, and other simple questions related to the previous lesson they had learned the day before (i.e. asking about the names of body parts, "*Which are your shoulders?*" and leading them to touch their shoulders and further answer, "*Here they are!*").

To link with the method, this activity is closely related to NA where teaching is divided into a three-stage category, namely pre-production stage, early-production stage and speech-emergent phase. First, in the pre-production stage, the students engaged in the target language spoken by the teacher but they were not forced to respond to it. In Toddler Class, pointing to body parts was the example of this stage. Second, in the early-production stage, students start to respond to short questions delivered by the teacher, in fixed conversational patterns. In the classroom, this is seen when Nora asked the toddlers, "*How are you? What's your name?*" Third, in the speech-emergent stage, students could show their active involvement towards the target language in a wider range of activities such as participating in group problem solving, sharing information and

opinion, etc. This activity, however, was not found in this classroom of young learners who did not have sufficient English yet to do it.

Questions in the classroom were related to the children's readiness in conducting activities. For instance, before the lessons began, she asked, "*Are you ready?*" When an activity was almost done, she asked, "*Are you finished?*" The children were also taught to share with others. When there was something to be shared, she would ask, "*Do you want to share with your friend?*" This activity is also linked to CLT which encourages students to be involved in English conversation as much as possible both in functional (i.e. comparing pictures, giving instructions, following directions, etc.) and social activities (i.e. role plays, simulations, improvisations, etc.). In the classroom, Nora used more social activities compared to functional activities. This was because the children were still young and were active in role-plays and simulations.

Prohibiting activities were one type of expressions in English (i.e. "*No*", "*Don't*", "*Not good*" and "*Very bad*"). When the toddlers did something inappropriate such as pushing their friends, disturbing, competing for toys, etc., the teacher would reprimand them in English, and most of the time she would repeat in Indonesian when the children seemed confused with the English phrase. Prohibition sounds like giving instruction, but the difference in prohibition is that negation words are used at the beginning of the sentence. From the observation, Nora said firmly, "*No climbing!*" when a toddler climbed on the table. She also repeated in a different phrase, "*Don't climb on the table!*" when another toddler disturbed others, she would say, "*Don't disturb your friends!*" There was also a time when a toddler tried to put sand in her mouth during an activity of playing with sand and Nora would stop the child by saying, "*Don't eat it! No, that's very bad.*"

Finally, the singing activities can be classified as SG where language learning is through music and other materials which support the learning environment. It is well-known that music can support very young children's early language learning (Parlakian & Lerner, 2010; Yuliana, 2003). This activity encouraged the children to grasp new vocabulary and understand its meaning in an entertaining way. KES had a number of collections of children's songs from tapes and DVDs. The singing activity began when the class started at 09.00 am, with the *Good Morning* song as a routine and then continued with some other songs such as *Parts of the Body*, *Name of the Days*, *You are my Sunshine*, *I Love Ice Cream*, and many others. Songs were also used to accompany other activities such as when the children had to clean up their toys after playing and *Barnie's Clean Up* song was sung with the toddlers. This song also suited the theme being taught that week. For example, the songs *Butterfly* and *Old McDonalds Had a Farm* were introduced and sung regularly to the children during the 'animals' theme week. Meanwhile, the songs sung in the Religion Center were more specific to Islamic studies, such as the *Names of Prophets* (the 25 Muslim Prophets) and *Asmaul Husna* (99 Names of Allah). Islamic songs were in different languages, i.e. Indonesian, English, and Arabic or in translated versions (from Indonesian or Arabic into English).

Nora sang the songs as well as using tapes and DVDs with the children whilst they did their activities. Mimics and gestures made by Nora were followed by the toddlers. She also made sure that she sang the words loudly with clear pronunciation to get the children sing the songs correctly. Another way of expressing the songs was by dancing, which most of the children enjoyed. Pictures and posters hung on the wall were also used to complement the songs. For

instance, when studying fruit, the song *Watermelon* was sung with the children pointing to each picture of the fruit on the poster. She would get the children one by one and help them point to the pictures whilst singing together.

The sixth interview question asked about the learners' role in the classroom. As shown in the observation guide, the toddlers' role in class was in line with TPR, where they acted as listeners and performers. Even though they were at a passive state by allowing the materials to work on them (i.e. as believed in SG) because they were still very young, they were also interacting with the teacher and peers (i.e. as demanded by CLT). An example posed by Nora was when these children took part in the Arts and Music Center, in which they usually conducted dramas. Role play in CLT involves both learners and teachers in continuous social interaction. This activity is also a part of SG, in which Nora had modified to suit her students' level. She explained in the following excerpts:

N: *We have Arts and Music center...we usually play drama in Arts. For example, last week the topic was Independence Day. We chose the children to act as a president, a policeman...we have the stage, so the students would perform and act there (according to their role). It was like a TV [show] and others were watching while waiting for their turn.*

I: *In English?*

N: *Yes, in English. So, the teacher also stood on the stage to accompany the child. We also do storytelling on the stage with the hand puppets in the puppet house. So, besides having the children to perform, we teachers can do in storytelling while the children watch us.*

I: *The children will ask questions in English?*

N: *Yes, if they answered in Indonesian, we would translate it.*

I: *Would you mind giving the example?*

N: *For example, last week, the topic was about "Occupation". Virza was the first to perform. Together with the teacher, he went up this stage (pointing to the stage) that looks like a big screen TV. He stood here. He greeted the other children with, "Hello, friends!" The other children responded, "Hello!", even though Virza was behind the TV screen stage. Then he introduced himself, "My name is Virza, one day I want to be a president". Then the teacher asked the other children, "Who else wants to be a president?"*

I: *Can Virza directly say that? "I want to be a President?"*

N: *No, we asked him first in Indonesian, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" After he answered (in Indonesian, too), we continued in English, "Ooo, Virza, one day, wants to be a President? So you say, I want to be a President."*

I: *He would repeat the words, "I want to be a President?"*

N: *Yes. Then the whole week we talked about the various occupation (e.g. president, policeman, teacher, doctor, etc.) and then now the children know how to say it properly...on what they want to be when they grow up.*

Hence, in the role play illustrated above, Nora initially generated a situational framework and learners selected a role (i.e. a profession) in accordance with their dreams for their future. When the toddlers said something in Indonesian, she would repeat the meaning in English in the form of a question (i.e. “*Ooo, Virza, one day, wants to be a President?*”). When she was assured that the toddler understood, then she asked him to repeat the phrase in English. It was hoped that the child would remember the phrase if he were asked again what he wanted to be when he grew up.

The seventh interview question asked about the teacher’s role. Nora explained that her role was to model to the toddlers and they were the listeners or performers. She was the instructor and main source of input for the children in the communication process. This approach is consistent with TPR, NA and CLT theories. An excerpt from the interview on this matter is as follows:

N: *Today, we were in the Gymnasium Center. To get them to exercise...be active...we turn on the music and danced. Usually we dance to Chicken Dance and Waka-Waka. But today it was Gummy Bear and Willy Wu. We download the songs and videos from the internet. The children follow our moves in dancing while we command them to do something. For example, to get their hands to move, we say “Okay, everyone hands up...and down!” We say and demonstrate to them, they follow. “Hands on hips! Foot to the left...foot to the right!” So they hear and see what the word is. This is hands [pointing to her hands]...this is foot [pointing to her foot]...up, down and so on.*

The excerpt above illustrates how English was taught through command in which the teacher said and demonstrated the words and the children listened and followed.

The last part of the interview was the role of materials in teaching vocabulary to the toddlers. Nora explained that there were no specific books used in Toddler Class, and they preferred to teach through pictures, actions, gestures and voice. In the interview, Nora elaborated:

N: *We do not have any specific books for Toddler Class but the curriculum has been set by Kiddos, such as topics to be covered every week. So, the teacher only has to develop them depending on the center of the day. For example, knowing parts of the body, I introduce them by singing and dancing at the Gymnasium Center by singing “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes”. When introducing flowers, we plant things in Our Little Garden (provided at the front yard of the school). So, we do not have any specific book for toddlers, but yes...there are (books) for kindergarteners, though, because these children start learning the alphabet to read and write at this stage.*

In line with the TPR, NA and CLT methods, the teacher did not use specific books for toddlers in KES. The teacher was given freedom to explore her teaching sources as long as it covered the topics set by the school. Pictures, real-life objects, and things in the classroom or around the school functioned as the teaching materials. Hence, the teaching materials were flexible. This strategy is in line with the TPR, NA and CLT methods that allowed the teacher to freely choose her teaching equipment. In the classroom toys (train, car, blocks, etc.), pictures, and children storybooks were available to support the teacher in the teaching and learning process. As for children storybooks, this is in accordance with Krashen (2013) who finds that read-aloud and storytelling are a great source of vocabulary in language learning because stories contain various words as well as grammar and cultural information.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings, TPR, NA, CLT and SG were applied in Toddler Class. The TPR method was observed the most in the classroom activities and evident in everyday commands. It was found that the very young children demonstrated their understanding of the action word by responding with simple answers or actions according to the commands. In line with NA, the toddlers in KES were situated in a natural environment and not forced to speak until they felt ready. The teacher continuously exposed the very young children to the target language through daily communication. CLT methods were used to encourage them to socially interact with each other. Although the teacher focused on the social context, she did not leave out the functional context. As they gradually showed improvement, the teacher believed the functional context would become more relevant in the classroom. Through SG methods the teacher created unconscious language learning by setting up a comfortable classroom environment. Music and dancing were used to familiarize them with English words. In line with these theories various media including pictures, voice, real-life objects, gestures, word charts, and magazines were used as teaching materials. No standard book was used in the teaching and learning process. Grammar was taught inductively and their vocabulary was based on the objects found around them. The teacher was further given the freedom to choose the appropriate materials based on her learners' needs or interests.

Although there is more work to be done, this study can be a useful contribution to the field of EFL teaching for very young children since there is currently very little work in the literature on this topic. In this study, classroom observation and an interview were conducted with the participant to understand her teaching experiences with toddlers at a private school in Aceh, Indonesia. This research is not without flaws, for example given the small scope of the study, it is challenging to generalize these findings. The study also has limitation in that it only focused on one class and teacher. Therefore, the needs for extended lines of inquiry in future research are recommended to be done, such as investigating a similar topic on more teachers and bilingual schools for very young children.

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