

PHONICS, STORYTELLING, AND BEYOND: STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING EARLY LITERACY IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL) involves specialized strategies and approaches to the unique needs of children learning English as a second language. Early literacy development in children is an important aspect of English language education, especially for young learners. This study discuss various strategies that can be applied in literacy teaching, with a focus on phonics and storytelling. Phonics, which deals with the relationship between letters and sounds, provides a strong foundation for children to understand written text. Meanwhile, storytelling is not only improving the students' listening and speaking skills, but also enriching their vocabularies and understanding of narrative structures. Through this approach that integrates phonics and storytelling, teachers can create an interactive and fun learning experience for students. This study also highlights the importance of emotional engagement in the learning process, where students are encouraged to recognize and express emotions through stories. Therefore, these strategies is not only support students' reading skills but also help them to build their identities as readers. Therefore, the combination of phonics and storytelling in teaching English for Young Learner is not only effective in improving literacy skills but also contributes to their social-emotional development.

Keywords: Phonics, Storytelling, Beyond, Early Literacy, Teaching English for Young Learners

1. INTRODUCTION

English as an International language plays an important role nowadays. English helps people to communicate with foreigners from different countries. Learning English can be started at early age. English for Young Learners refers to children's learning of English in pre-primary or primary (elementary) school education, for whom English is not their first language. It includes children whose first language is the national language of their country, when learning English there as an additional language (Islahuddin, 2023).

The early age period, also known as early childhood which children between 2 and 6 years old. At this age it can also be said to be the golden age of children. They will experience rapid growth and development at this time. Therefore, they will remember what they learn. In relation with this, Ratminingsih (2021) in Juliari (2024) state that it is a potential period for learners to acquire language and even multilingualism at once, because their language acquisition devices are good. Early childhood is a period of growth that determines future development. Early childhood education, especially English, could improve children's achievement and build their English language skills from an early age.

In relation with this, early childhood education standards explain that language development in early childhood is divided into three aspects: understanding language, speaking language, and literacy (Novita, 2018). Reading is one aspect

of English language development plays an important role. Early reading skills are essential for young learners, especially in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Developing early reading skills involves a variety of approaches that aim to improve children's skills, knowledge and understanding of reading and writing. Early reading skills provide the foundation for future academic success. Early reading for preschoolers is the ability to read letters, syllables, and sentences presented in written form and applied in spoken form. Reading skills enable young learners to access knowledge, develop critical thinking skills and communicate effectively (Khotimah, Abidin, Wahono, and Suweleh, 2023)

The introduction of English literacy for young children is not without reason. For EFL learners, early reading skills are very important as it helps them acquire vocabulary, understand grammatical structures and improve overall language proficiency. Early reading experience is highly recommended for young children because at this age they have excellent language acquisition devices and memory. However, teaching English as a second language to young learners is challenging due to their characteristics and learning environment. Early childhood tends to develop kinesthetic and motor skills, which means that English learning should be adapted to their learning style (Whiteside, 2017). By following their learning style, it is hoped that they will have fun learning experience and they will remember it well. Meanwhile, the role of teachers in developing literacy for early childhood is necessary. In this case teachers' acts as a facilitator who can build children's English language skills. Therefore, appropriate and effective learning techniques and strategies are needed to achieve good learning outcomes that can have an impact on children's cognitive development (Flynn, 2007). This article will discuss some strategies that can be used by teacher in developing Early Literacy in Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL). Ethnopedagogy, in simple terms, refers to ethnicity-based learning, either as a learning source or as a teaching medium. In its implementation, ethnopedagogy, which originates from the culture of a specific ethnic group, undergoes a transformation. This transformation includes aspects of content, perspective, process, and context (Burns, 2015). The goal of ethnopedagogy is to reconcile two or more cultural elements by modifying both (Rahmawati et al., 2020). Ethnopedagogy is an educational approach rooted in culture (Firmansyah et al., 2021). It highlights local wisdom as an essential part of education and civilization. In Indonesia, ethnopedagogy is founded on philosophical, socio-cultural, and psychological principles (Selasih & Sudarsana, 2018). It has been proven to enhance students' learning outcomes and effectively instill social values (Lestari & Bahri, 2021). Furthermore, ethnopedagogy helps students develop the right attitudes toward the values of national culture (Rahmawati et al., 2020).

As a medium for preserving local wisdom, the ethnopedagogical approach plays a strategic role in strengthening cultural identity. It views local wisdom as a source of innovation and skills that can be leveraged for the well-being of society. Given Indonesia's diverse cultural, ethnic, and customary traditions, knowledge of ethnopedagogy is crucial for preserving and developing its utilization. In elementary schools, ethnopedagogy has not been optimally implemented, despite thematic learning requiring the inclusion of local wisdom. This suboptimal implementation is due to inadequate facilities and infrastructure (Oktavianti & Ratnasari, 2018).

Thus, this research focuses on ethnopedagogy in audio-visual learning media based on the transformation of *Satua Tong Ceng Pung Pung Jir* in elementary schools in Bali. The central research question is: How well is the audio-visual learning media based on the transformation of *Satua Tong Ceng Pung Pung Jir* received by students in elementary schools in Bali? Ethnopedagogy has a positive impact on students' physical, emotional, and communicative development. It emphasizes local knowledge and wisdom as sources of inspiration, innovation, and skills that can be empowered for the greater benefit of society (Ariyani et al., 2020).

2. RESEARCH METODOLOGY

This study utilizes a secondary data analysis approach to explore phonic, storytelling and beyond as strategies in developing English literacy for young learners. This method involves systematically reviewing and synthesizing data from reliable existing sources, enabling the researcher to gain insights without the need for original data collection (Kothari, 2004).

3. RELATED RESEARCH/LITERATUR REVIEW

The Importance of Early Literacy

Literacy is one of the abilities that should be possessed by an individual. There are some benefits of literacy are increasing vocabulary and developing writing skills. This is because literacy activities familiarize students with reading activities and interpreting various kinds of information. Literacy is related to reading and writing activities. Through reading activities, students will know various styles of writing and they can write in systematically order. Putra (2020) determines that, there are six types of literacy, namely: (a) numeracy literacy, (b) science literacy, (c) financial literacy, (d) cultural literacy, (e) digital literacy, and (f) reading and writing literacy. Digital and reading also writing literacy are becoming the main focus of this study. Reading and writing literacy is a basic literacy that should be had by the students. Reading and writing literacy means that everyone has reading and writing skills by optimizing all the skills they have. Students can understand and retell the information they get from reading activities. Besides reading skill, students are also expected to be able to write what they read. Literacy is not just reading and writing, but students' abilities to process and understand information thoroughly by doing the process of reading and writing (Purandina & Juliari, 2021). So reading and writing literacy is the basic literacy that students must have before they master other literacies.

The other literacy that should be known by the students is digital literacy. Digital literacy includes the ability of a person, especially students, to utilize information in various digital channels and operate them. Digital literacy is the ability of a person to sort and understand information written on various digital media (Bawden, 2008). Early childhood is now able to operate various platforms. This requires the role of parents to choose wisely the correct and useful information for children. Thus, it is very necessary to provide digital literacy for children and can start from early childhood.

Early literacy is a foundational aspect of child development that encompasses the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for reading and writing. Early literacy skills include a range of competencies such as phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, narrative skills, and print awareness, which collectively contribute to a child's ability to engage with written language effectively.

Language, literacy and reading development in the prekindergarten year proceeds through several levels of foundational skills with skills and behaviors becoming more complex and more proficient as children get older. According to the NICHD (2000), foundation skills include three elements, namely:

- a. **Phonemic awareness** is the awareness that spoken words are made up of individual sounds (phonemes) and the ability to manipulate these sounds. Phonemic awareness refers to the ability to recognize, identify and manipulate phonemes in spoken words. Phonemic awareness is grounded in oral language and serves as the foundation for reading development. Children who cannot hear and work with the phonemes of spoken words will have a difficult time learning how to relate these phonemes to graphemes (a letter or a number of letters that represent a phoneme in a word) when they see them in written words. This pre-phonics problem interferes with the learning of letter

and sound connections. Meanwhile, **Phonological awareness** is the ability to recognize that words are made up of a variety of sound units. Phonological awareness is an umbrella term and encompasses a number of sound related skills necessary for reading development (Lane, 2007). As children develop phonological awareness they begin to learn that words can be segmented into syllables and each syllable begin with a sound (onset) and ends with another sound (rime). They also come to understand that words are made up of small sound units (phonemes) and that these units can be manipulated to form different words. By engaging in language and word play, children learn to recognize patterns among words and use this knowledge to read and build words.

- b. **Knowledge of high-frequency sight words** is the most common words, which students should be able to read quickly and automatically. Knowledge of the alphabet and phonological awareness are both strong predictors of later decoding and comprehension and teaching these in combination has a consistently positive impact on improving students' later decoding and reading comprehension abilities (Shanahan & Lonigan, 2013). Phonological awareness provides the foundation for phonics. Phonics, the understanding that sounds and print letters are connected, is the first step towards conventional reading.
- c. **The ability to decode words** is used to translate a word from print to speech (for example, by using known sound-symbol correspondences to sound a word out and decipher it). The ability to decode words is a fundamental skill for children, serving as the basic of literacy development.

The Importance of Teaching English for Young Learners

English education for early childhood requires approaches and learning methods that are appropriate for children's developmental characteristics. The most sensitive period for language in a person's life is between the ages of 2 – 7 years old. During this period, all aspects of language must be introduced to children before this sensitive period ends (Khairani, 2016).

English learning for early childhood must be done gradually and only limited to introduction or basics. They will easily remember the simple word first. One of the primary advantages of teaching English to young learners is their natural ability to absorb language, which is often attributed to their lower inhibition levels and enthusiasm for learning. Young children are less self-conscious about making mistakes, allowing them to engage more freely in language practice, which can lead to native-like proficiency over time (Saputra & Yolanda, 2020). English education in early childhood not only involves vocabulary introduction but also requires appropriate methods to improve understanding and language use. Learning methods used must be able to create a fun and interactive atmosphere, for example through singing, games, or using pictures (Nasution, 2024).

Moreover, the pedagogical approaches employed in teaching English to young learners significantly influence their language acquisition outcomes. Techniques such as Project-Based Learning (PBL) have been shown to enhance not only language proficiency but also critical thinking skills among young learners (Kurniadi & Cahyaningrum, 2023). The role of parents and teachers is also crucial in supporting young learners' English language development. Additionally, teachers must be equipped with the appropriate skills and methodologies to effectively teach English to young learners, as their approaches can significantly impact students' motivation and engagement (Tu, 2024).

Characteristics of Young Learners

Characteristics are one of the crucial things in teaching language, especially teaching English for young learners. Ratminingsih, et al (2021) states that learning the characteristics of young learners is an important thing for educators. By

knowing their characteristics, educators can determine the right teaching strategies, methods and techniques so that they can understand the learning well.

Harmer, et al (2021) explains the characteristics of young learners, namely: (a) Children have a great curiosity to try something new. Students with this characteristics will be very happy when they are given a new knowledge that they have never heard before, (b) Children construct meaning from their experiences. These experiences refer to what they see, hear, touch and feel, (c) Children will easily get bored when faced with boring lessons using the lecture technique without involving students. For this reason, activities are needed where students are involved in a learning process, (d) Children will be interested in learning that uses themselves as the topic of class discussion. This can relate the topic being studied to their real lives, (e) children tend to learn well if the lesson is interesting, meaningful and functional. Meaningful and functional learning can be realized if the teacher pays attention to the student's need, (f) children should not learn in a competitive environment. Competitive environments can make children experience anxiety, and (g) Children learn things based on themes. It is because children will not confuse on the material given. They will find it difficult to learn it all at once. Therefore, theme-based learning is highly recommended for teaching English for young learners.

In addition, young learners have their own characteristics that can influence their learning style. Learning Styles in English Language Learning In early childhood English education, it is important to understand that each child has a different learning style. According to Mahadi et al., 2022, there are three main learning styles that need to be considered in the learning process:

1. Visual Learning Style

Children with visual learning styles understand information more easily through visual observation. They tend to pay close attention to the teacher, understand better when learning uses images, and prefer to read on their own rather than being read to by others (Jima et al., 2023). English language learning for children with visual learning styles can be facilitated through the use of pictures, videos, and other visual aids.

2. Auditory Learning Style

Children with auditory learning styles understand information more easily through hearing. They show enthusiasm when listening to teacher explanations, are active in discussions, and often move their lips when reading. Appropriate learning methods include songs, stories, and discussions (Nurjaman et al., 2024).

3. Kinesthetic Learning Style

Children with kinesthetic learning styles learn best through physical activities and movement. They tend to be unable to sit still for long periods, often tap their pens, and understand better when learning is accompanied by physical activities or direct involvement (Jima et al., 2023). The Total Physical Response (TPR) method is very effective for kinesthetic learners because it involves physical movement in the learning process. To accommodate these three learning styles, educators need to use a multi-sensory approach that combines various learning methods. The integrated use of songs, movements, and visual aids can help maximize English language learning for all children with different learning styles.

Challenging for Teaching English for Young Learners

Teaching English to young learners have some challenges for educators. Young children often have limited attention spans and may become easily distracted, necessitating teaching strategies that are dynamic and engaging (Winola, 2021). These challenges come from various sources, including the students' characteristics, teachers' proficiency, and the learning environment. The first challenge comes from the students themselves with their different needs in gaining knowledge. As stated before, teacher has three learning styles, namely: visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning style.

Teacher's proficiency as another challenges in teaching English for young learners. Many teachers face difficulties due to limited time that the teacher have to teach their students at school. Besides that young learners have varying levels of English proficiency. Teachers also face the challenge of low students' motivation, self-confidence, unclear pronunciation, and varying levels their learning environment. Some teacher also lack of confidence in using information and technology.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Phonics as a Fundamental Strategy for Developing Early Literacy in Teaching English For Young Learners

Phonics instruction is widely recognized as a crucial foundation for achieving literacy proficiency, especially in early childhood education. It involves teaching children the relationship between sounds (phonemes) and their corresponding letters (graphemes), enabling them to decode unfamiliar words. The application of phonics instruction in rural public primary schools is increasingly recognized for its potential to address foundational literacy challenges, particularly in environments where resources are limited. Phonics, which emphasizes the relationship between sounds and letters, has shown to be an effective tool in helping young learners grasp the basics of reading (Celement and Otieno, 2024).

The National Reading Panel (2000) and Ehri (2020) found that children exposed to phonics instruction demonstrate enhanced reading skills, particularly in decoding and word recognition, compared to those who rely solely on whole language approaches. This phonetic foundation is essential for young learners to become proficient readers, as it equips them with the skills to tackle unfamiliar words, promoting reading fluency and comprehension. In addition there are key aspects of phonics instruction, namely:

1. Decoding Skills

One aspect of phonics instruction is Decoding Skill. Phonics emphasizes the skill of decoding new words by sounding them out and combining or 'blending' their sound-spelling patterns. Phonic blending is a way for students to decipher words by combining the spellings of the sounds they know. From this process students learn to increase their English vocabularies.

2. Engaging Activities

As a teacher it is important to prepare interesting learning activities. Interactive phonics activities, such as games and songs, make learning fun and motivate students to practice reading regularly. In addition, teachers can also use diverse and interesting media to support beginning reading activities, helping children learn easily and feel excited.

3. Literacy Development

In the process of cognitive language development, children begin to understand language rule systems which include phonology (sensitivity to language sounds), syntax (understanding word arrangement in sentences), and semantics (word use according to meaning). Children's cognitive language development is strongly influenced by their active role in their environment, how they obtain information, and how they conclude a language. Besides that, phonics is a method for teaching reading and writing of English by developing learners' phonemic awareness. This understanding is crucial for developing

reading fluency and comprehension skills, which are essential for lifelong literacy.

B. The Role of Storytelling

Storytelling as an important role in developing early literacy skills for young learners, particularly in the context of teaching English. The integration of storytelling into early childhood education not only enhances language acquisition but also fosters critical cognitive and social-emotional skills essential for literacy development. Storytelling is an activity that children are most interested in. They love listening to stories or reading books with lots of pictures. Storytelling activities can develop language skills, increase vocabulary, text comprehension and improve listening skills. Besides that, through storytelling activities the students can improve their critical thinking skills, understand the storyline, good characters and bad characters, and can take moral messages. In teaching English to young learners through storytelling, teachers can explore the stories. The stories can be told in a variety of unique styles, using intonation, movement, body and expression to attract students' attention and participation in learning process Nasir and Inayah (2018) in Ratminingsih, et al (2021)in

Storytelling activity for young learners could be done by using some media such as pictures series, puppets or finger puppets. Teachers can also involve children directly in the activity. For example, by inviting some children to bring pictures or finger puppets and sequence them according to the storyline. This will make the story telling activity more fun for students. Besides telling stories directly using various storybook, teachers can also use digital stories. Digital stories in the form of audio or moving video have several advantages, namely the teacher can repeat several times the part of the story that is being told, so that students will more easily understand the contents of the story. In addition, digital videos have colorful sounds and colors so that they can attract students' attention and interest in learning.

In relation with these, research indicates that storytelling activities, whether traditional or digital, significantly contribute to children's literacy and language skills. For instance, highlight that the combination of storytelling with structured instructional methods can effectively enhance both literacy and digital literacy in early childhood settings (Maureen et al., 2018). This is emphasizing that early language experiences, including storytelling, are crucial for developing literacy skills in English second language learners.

Moreover, storytelling fosters emotional engagement and collaboration between teachers and children, which are vital for creating a conducive learning environment. Xiao et al (2023) argue that emotional engagement during storytelling can significantly enhance literacy experiences for young children, thereby improving their reading and mental health outcomes. In line with this, asserts that storytelling is a powerful tool for language learning, as children often listen to the same stories repeatedly, which helps them acquire vocabulary and sentence structures (Bezilova, 2019) asserts that storytelling is a powerful tool for language learning, as children often listen to the same stories repeatedly, which helps them acquire vocabulary and sentence structures.

There are some benefits of storytelling activities in Early Literacy for young learners, namely:

1. Vocabulary Development.

Direct or digital storytelling activities can improve and develop students' vocabulary. Storytelling introduces children to a wide range of vocabulary, exposing them to new words and phrases that they may not encounter in everyday communication. The table below is the example of the use of storytelling could enhance students' vocabularies.

Table 1. Example of Storytelling Activities in Enhancing Students' Early Literacy

No.	Name of Animal	Tame Animal	Wild Animal	Description
1.	Lion		√
2.	Dog	√	

Based on the table above, the teacher tells a story related to fables. The teacher ask the students to determine the name of the animal in the story and determine the type of animal whether it belongs to wildlife or tame animal by filling the checklist symbol. The students could describe the animal with its characteristics. From this activity, students will listen to the story well and use their critical thinking in determining the object according to the teacher's command. In addition, students will recognize the names and types of animals in English.

2. Comprehension Skills

In storytelling activities, children learn to follow a narrative structure and understand concepts from beginning until end of the story. They develop comprehension skills by making sense of the plot, characters, and events, which are crucial for reading and understanding texts. Active listening during storytelling sessions also enhances their ability to interpret and analyze information.

3. Language Skill

Storytelling can improve children's language skills. Students' involvement in the lesson is very important so that students understand the material more quickly. Storytelling activities can be used in speaking lessons. The teacher can ask students to retell what they heard from the teacher's story. Students can do role play as the character in the story. This method can improve the oral language skills of children.

4. Cognitive and Socio Emotional Development

Cognitive and language development in early childhood has a very close relationship and influences each other. Basically, early childhood is in the preoperational stage which has highly egocentric characteristics, does not understand abstract things, and still has pre-logical thinking (Nasution, 2024). At this stage, children use symbols or sign language and intuitive concepts in their development. Storytelling sessions promote empathy and social understanding, as children learn about different cultures and moral values through the stories.

5. Literacy Skill

As stated before storytelling activities could improve students' literacy skills. Through the storytelling activity, students could improve their language skills because they practice letter symbols and learn the stages of language development.

C. "BEYOND" STRATEGIES IN FOSTERING EARLY LITERACY FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

Fostering early literacy in young children requires a variety of approaches that integrate holistic strategies and methodologies. Additional strategies are needed to recognize and develop students' literacy. These additional strategies can help teachers provide diverse learning activities in the classroom because one of the characteristics of early childhood is that they easily get bored with

monotone thing. There are some additional strategies that can be used by teachers in developing early literacy for young learners, namely:

1. Game-based learning

The implementation of game-based learning strategies is shown to enhance literacy instruction. Guo (2024) discusses how game-based approaches can engage children and promote literacy skills in a fun and interactive manner. This method is not only makes learning enjoyable but also helps in developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are essential for literacy.

2. Oral Language Skills

Oral language skills are essential for early literacy development. This skill provides the foundational competencies that are necessary for reading comprehension and overall academic success. This skills are great for students' futures when it is given from an early age. Early childhood is a golden age where students are faster to accept and remember new things.

Research highlights that the relationship between oral language proficiency and reading achievement, suggesting that children with strong oral language skills are better equipped to decode text and understand its meaning. This relationship is particularly evident in bilingual contexts, where oral language skills in one language can positively influence reading comprehension in another language (Goodrich, Fitton, and Thayer, 2022).

3. Technology Integration

Rapid technology development requires teachers to integrate technology into learning process. The integration of technology into early literacy education has become increasingly recognized as a vital component in enhancing students' literacy skills. This approach is not only facilitates engagement but also supports personalized learning experiences tailored to individual needs.

One of the primary benefits of technology integration is its ability to foster personalized learning environments. Wang (2024) emphasizes that personalized learning, supported by technology, allows educators to address individual learning preferences and needs, thereby optimizing educational outcomes. This is particularly crucial in early literacy, where children exhibit varying levels of readiness and interest.

4. Diverse needs of all learners

Addressing the diverse needs of all learners, including those with special needs, is crucial for effective early literacy development. Kurniastuti, Evanjeli, and Sari (2023) highlight the necessity for teachers to implement adaptive learning strategies and collaborate with special education professionals to ensure that all children receive appropriate literacy instruction. This inclusive approach is not only supports students with special needs but also enriches the learning environment for all students.

5. Teacher's Professional Development

Professional development for educators is another fundamental strategy. Research by Cadime, Alves, Mendes, Pinto, and Cruz (2024) indicates that ongoing professional development is essential for supporting emergent literacy development in preschool education. By equipping educators with the necessary skills and knowledge, they can better in facilitating child-centered practices that foster literacy growth.

5. CONCLUSION

Teaching English to young learners (TEYL) requires a deeply understanding of the developmental and educational needs of children learning a second

language. This research highlights the importance of early literacy development as a foundation of English language education for young learners. By using specific strategies such as phonics and storytelling, educators can effectively address the unique challenges faced by children in this learning context. Teaching English to young learners offers significant advantages when approached with appropriate methods that consider their unique characteristics and learning styles. Early literacy development, coupled with engaging and supportive teaching strategies, provide a strong foundation for future academic success and effective communication skills in English.

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