

# Perspectives of Final-Year EFL University Students on Using Stories in English Teaching to Young Learners

**Mrs.P.Madhuri**

Assistant Professor, Department of H&S,  
Malla Reddy College of Engineering for Women.,  
Maisammaguda., Medchal., TS, India

## Abstract

*The teaching of English to non-native English Young Learners requires more attempts rather than teaching learners in older ages. Nowadays, technology has offered many benefits for EYL teachers. Technology, in one side, is helpful instrument for the teachers in dealing with EYL. In the other side, easiness offered by technology may bring consequences on the EYL teachers' creative competence. EFL university students in the world are now habituated with technology-based teaching and learning media. They are demanded to improve the skill to use those media and due to the demand, their creativity in developing method and technique to teach EYL without technology aids is in a serious jeopardy. At least, they will deal with classic difficulty in teaching EYL for example by using only a written story; the difficulty meant is lacking of idea. This research was accomplished to investigate it. By employing written submission, data from eight last year EFL University students revealed their ideas on using story in teaching EYL is under expectation. By employing descriptive interpretation on their written submission, it is indicated that their ideas are heavily tailored to use technology aids.*

## 1. Introduction

The practice of teaching English towards the speakers of other language is a challenging process which requires strategic and creative attempts; one of the attempts is creatively using materials. As the teaching of English is now on the same level with the teaching of other sciences, putting learning process merely as communication learning is not enough. Language learning is now developed and practiced in many technical learning fields (say laboratories, computer-based classroom, etc.) which show that English teachers and the learners face increasing challenges. The development of language teaching and learning presents both advantageous result and

disadvantageous one. Advantageously, the development of language teaching and learning practice results in more comprehensive development in language mastery. The other result is difficulties faced by both teacher and learners; the development requires other development in some respects like computer skill, facilities, and so forth. Even the use of course book, especially in Teaching EYL, has double sided effects (see Puskas, 2006, p. 22-24). Relevant to this issue, teaching English to young learners becomes not easy. Not only do the learners face difficulties in learning in such technical fields, but also the teachers face difficulties in "simplifying" the teaching and learning material delivery.

EFL university students, who will occupy English teacher profession in the future, are prepared to teach English in "modern" way. Although *English for young learners* is presented in schools even in the elementary school (Baksh, 2016, p. 120) where the students are very young, but the EFL students seem to be costumed to teach in modern arena (where the young learners may be not experienced enough to follow the process); as a result of globalization and technology development (examples can be seen in Van Scoter (2004). It looks like they are educated to "catch the train". Young learners, in the other side, are still young learners. We are saying that teaching English for young learners need to be as simple as possible to attain the same result as teaching in "difficult way". Therefore, the EFL students should be taught how to teach based on creativity. Too habituated with computerized teaching strategy like computer, internet, website, e-learning, and so on, could make the students' mind absent from how to teach without all of those devices and media. We develop the way of teaching English or other languages such way because we want to be more efficient and we want to put language learning just like natural sciences learning. We also want to understand language more than yesterday. However, we are also leaving the natural aspect of language learning, which is human communication in natural setting. In some respect, it can be said that computer is not making language learning easier. It makes

language learning complicated (think about teaching English for young learners today). Considering the issues raised in the paragraphs above, it is important to go back for a while and see whether our EFL university students are able to teach English to young learners by using “traditional” method and materials like stories, pictures, things around, and so on. We can ask how the students use Google or at least how to use digital dictionary installed on their phone in getting materials and developing the way they deliver the material, or teaching others. Imagine that in a context where those are all inaccessible and they will not run any teaching and learning process due to the lack of creativity and stuck on technology.

It is important to know how the students (or teachers) of English education developing ideas in using materials without technology-based help. Technology may help them very much in the learning process today, but it is possible that technology may ruin their days of teaching English for young learners tomorrow. Therefore, through this research, we are going to see how creative the students are, in using stories in teaching English to young learners.

### **1.1. Literature Review**

In this section, we present reviews on relevant concepts, theories, and research findings related to the practice of English teaching and learning especially to young learners.

#### **1.1.1. Teaching English (as foreign language) to Young Learners**

Young learners, in learning language, tend to learn it naturally as a skill mediating them to live. However, the learning of first language and foreign language take different process for young learners. In this case, teaching English as foreign language to young learner is not as easier as to teach adolescents or adults. The teachers need to understand the characteristics of young learners in learning language which is also different from learning or acquiring other skills. Most experts in this field write how to teach English or other languages to young learners or children. However, most of the texts discuss English learning as the first language and not as foreign language. We need to understand that children in playgroups or kindergarten bring their home culture including the language they acquire and use every day. Even, in Britain, where English is native language, children do not start to learn English until they start at an early years settings or formal settings (Crosse, 2007, p. 2). It can be imagined that children in other countries (like Indonesia) where English is treated as foreign language will learn English as they learn other

“foreign” sciences like how to use computer or playing music instruments. Bringing their home culture, their mother tongue, teaching a foreign language like English can be so much challenging; the children are habituated to use their mother tongue and replacing it for a moment needs strategic and creative attempts. Moreover, in this age, they could not understand the importance of why they should learn it or have it. They may not critically think why they should change *mama* to *mother* but the question remains in their head. The other thing is that, they don’t use the new vocabulary at home unless their parents also speak English. This could result in weak or low learning result.

#### **1.1.2. Young Learners Age**

Young learners are categorized into chronological age span from 5 years old to 10 years old. Scott & Ytreberg (2004, p.1) divided young learners into two main groups: 5-7, and 8-10 years old. They say that there are differences in what the children in group one can do and what the children group two can do. They distinguish the children in age groups because they consider that different age group has different characteristics. In teaching English as foreign language, “young learner” could be interpreted as age and also experience. It can be assumed that a 15 years old student who never learns English before can be categorized as young learner. However, there is no consensus among experts about this assumption until today. Therefore, the age classification for this is applied both in the teaching of English as first language and as foreign language.

Slightly different to Scott & Ytreberg (2004), Linse (2005, p.2) state that “young learners are defined as children between the ages of 5-12 years old”. Linse also said that teachers of young learners need to adjust educational experiences to meet the developmental stages of the individual child. This statement implies that Linse also agrees if young learners are categorized into several stages and therefore the teachers should pay attention on the characteristics, needs, experiences, and practices appropriate for the children (in any stage).

Cameron (2001, p. 15) also classified children into two stages. The first stage is children with ages between 7-8 years as younger children. And the second stage is children with ages between 12-14 years as older children. Cameron also mentioned that the children in different stage will learn language differently with the other stage (p.13). The discussion about children classification by age above points to a common hypothesis called critical period. The young learners are considered to be in a critical period of learning. This is the reason that many experts believe that young learners learn language

better than adult because in this period their brain works better.

### **This is noted by Cameron:**

The Critical Period Hypothesis is the name given to the idea that young children can learn a second language particularly effectively before puberty because their brain are still able to use the mechanism that assisted first language acquisition. (Cameron, 2001, p.13).

In short, the students considered as young learners are they in the age between 5 years up and 15 years down. In Indonesia, children start to learn in kindergarten from age 5-7, and they come to elementary school at age 7. They normally completed elementary school in 6 years. It means that they will pass elementary school at age 13. Therefore, in this research, we convert age into school level and we consider young learners as the children in kindergarten and elementary school.

## **2. Methods**

This research is designed as a descriptive qualitative research. It is based on the nature of the purpose and data types of this research. Since this research is naturalistic and is accomplished to search and to find understanding in specific context, then this research is qualitative. This is in line with Nunan & Bailey (2009) that qualitative data have to do with meanings (and understanding on the meanings).

### **2.1. Research Participants**

This research involves 8 EFL students who are purposively taken from a university in Indonesia. Those participants are taken by considering some relevant assumption among others:

- They are the students of English Education Program who are taught English as foreign language and also are taught how to teach English as foreign language;
- They are last year students who are assumed to have English learning and teaching practice experiences, and they have attended 90% subjects in their program;
- They are high achiever students with grade point average ranged from 3.00-4.00 (the highest GPA in Indonesia is 4.00); and
- They are willing to be actively involved in this research.

These considerations are taken into account to keep the reliability of this research finding. These are also attempts to gain valid and responsible information. Furthermore, the participants (EFL University Students) name are not written but coded according to the initial letter in their names.

### **2.2. Instrument**

The researcher uses written submission by the participants which contains three open-ended questions regarding the use of story in teaching English (as foreign language) to young learners. The questions are developed by studying the related literatures reviewed.

### **2.3. Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher visited the university and communicates the purpose the research. The participants taken from each university are selected by the head of the English education program. They are then placed in a room and being given three open-ended questions. They are demanded to write the answers on the provided sheet. Given 60 minutes, the students submit their written responses to the researcher. These written submissions are the data contain their ideas to be investigated and explored. This technique has been used by Mart (2012) with different question. This study only adopts the kind of instrument with some adjustments by considering the purpose of the study.

### **2.4. Data Analysis**

Data from the written submission are analyzed by employing *Meaning Condensation* explained by Nunan and Bailey (2009). This technique is used by finding pattern in the written submission. The texts are read to find the topical ideas findable by searching keywords used by the participants within their work. Those are then paraphrased and noted as the key points in their text. The findings are then discussed and interpreted in light with the relevant theories. Finally, their ideas are listed as the potential activities and strategies in teaching English to young learners through the use of story.

## **3. Results**

The respondents submitted their answers toward the following questions:

- a. What will you teach to the young learners by using the story?
- b. How do you teach it?

c. What difficulty you may deal with when teaching it?

The answers towards those questions are considered as *ideas* they have to teach English to young learners by using stories. By employing meaning condensation technique as mentioned earlier, the written submission reflects at least three items that can be mentioned as follow:

- a. Vocabulary;
- b. Word-Reference Matching;
- c. Reading;

Through the written submission, the researcher found that some students express their ideas that using story is beneficial in teaching English to young learners in more than one area of skill or language item. By percentage, each item has following quality:

**Table 1.** Percentage of language items can be taught by using story

No	Items	%
1	Vocabulary	50
2	Word-Reference Matching	30
3	Reading	20

It can be seen that *vocabulary*, *word-reference matching*, and *reading* place the higher position than the other items. However, in the discussion section, the researcher briefly elaborated the ideas behind the items by trying to grasp it from the written submission and relating them to the available theories and concept in this context.

## 4. Discussion

This part explores the data collected through the written submission which have been condensed into 3 items as mentioned in the previous part. The exploration and elaboration are not self-explanatory rather than interconnected to the theories and concepts available contemporarily. However, it is crucial to be mentioned here that due to the size of the participants (which is too small), the information projected on the following pages should be considered as tentative projection of ideas rather than absolute answers towards the research question. The next important information to say is that the cited responses are grammatically corrected by the researcher to avoid misunderstanding.

### 4.1. Teaching Vocabulary through Story

50% participants agreed that the story is useful in teaching vocabulary to young learners. The

participants considered that since children are interested on story, they are able or motivated to memorize words, even difficult ones. Here, one of the participants wrote:

“...for more understanding to the meaning of the story, the students are asked to choose the difficult words to memorize.” (TS). The respondent proposed the teaching of EYL by using story is started by giving written story to the children and then reading the story together. The children may find some difficult words and those words are memorized by them. However, it seems like the respondent imagined the children as the native speaker of English. The problem is clearly seen that for non-native English children may find all words are strange words. Therefore, it is assumed that asking the children to memorize difficult words is even more difficult for the children. It might be easier to introduce some words used in the story (mainly nouns and verbs) rather than memorizing difficult words since all words are “difficult words” for untrained non-native English children.

The other respondent wrote that:

“...there are two kinds of thing that I can teach to the kindergarten [students]. First is pronunciation and second is vocabulary... I will ask them to repeat the word with the right pronunciation... I will tell the learners the words and the meaning and we are going to memorize it.” (IED).

This respondent is aware that vocabulary and pronunciation (spelling as well) cannot be separated in the teaching of English. She emphasized the repetition of pronouncing the words that the students are learning and this can be considered as more than memorization but also as a phonological training to the students. In the last, she points out that knowing the meaning of the word is easier than memorizing and pronouncing the word. The respondent also reports a problem that the teacher may deal with when teaching young learners. She wrote:

“We have to understand more that teaching young learners is more difficult than adult learners. We have to understand that they do not focus like adult. They may focus only 5 or 10 minutes and after that they will not in focus. I will teach them indirectly after 5 or 10 minutes, such as telling them while they are playing and do not force them.” (IED). The respondent mentions the ability of the young learners to focus on the material being delivered by the teacher. It is true that young learners have low focus ability since their natural learning approach is by playing. This confirms Puskas (2016) that young learners learning by playing. The ability to focus on certain point in certain duration needs a conscious attempt and this is inharmonious with Mart (2012) who mentioned that young learners tend to learn



unconsciously. The other respondent coded MT tries to explain how he will teach vocabulary through story. However, he tends to consider more exposure in the learning process. Here he wrote:

“Firstly, I will ask to the students to read the story. Then I will teach vocabulary by using dictionary. However, before I start to teach, I will ask them to open their own dictionary. So, our learning will be effective.” (MT).

It is hard to imagine that the young learners who are not English native speakers can read the story written in English unless they have been trained before. It is also difficult to imagine that they can utilize dictionary as teenager or adult do. Scott & Ytreberg (2004) mentioned that even learners in 8 years old still rely on the spoken words. It means that reading the story and dictionary is a difficult way of learning vocabulary for them.

This respondent wrote about the difficulties he may deal with in teaching young learners as follow:

“They sometimes ignore what I say. I must repeat my sentence again and again because they don’t understand what I say. The class is noisy.” (MT). The most probable reason of the young learners ignorance towards the teacher or the material is that the way the teacher deliver the learning material is not engaging the students’ learning motivation. Teaching young learners by using written text such as printed story and dictionary is considerably boring. The students, as mentioned by Mart (2012) and Scott & Ytreberg (2004) could try to find “comfort zone” to escape from the boredom. Therefore, it is reasonable that they will not understand what the teacher is saying as the logical consequence of the ignorance toward the teacher.

Relatively different to MT, respondent coded IAK wrote:

“Illustrated storybooks provide an ideal resource for helping children to learn English... storybooks present familiar language and memorable context and high quality illustrations help children to understand as they match what they hear to what they see.” (IAK).

For IAK, teaching the young learners by using illustrated story such as comic is better than what MT mentioned. This is very useful in teaching vocabulary since the young learners are able to memorize the context of the word or the reference of the word. Visual aids like storybooks are very beneficial and easier to be used rather than written story and dictionary as MT imagined.

#### **Summary:**

In sum, the respondents have a sort of ideas of using story to teach vocabulary to the young learners. They also point out the procedures they may apply in doing it. They are also aware about the problems that they

may deal in the situation which refer to the nature of children like the lack of focus or too easily distracted by environment. However, overall, they do not pay attention much on the difference between English-native children and non-native ones. Therefore, by considering the procedures they mention in the discussion above, the problem that they may deal in the field can be much more challenging than they know.

#### **4.2. Teaching Word-Reference Matching**

30% of the participants mentioned that they may teach the young learners the association between words and the references. Theoretically, stories are beneficial in the teaching of foreign languages (especially English) to young learners because stories provide appealing materials for young learners linguistically, psychologically, cognitively, socially, and culturally (Celce-Murcia, in Kalantari & Hashemian, 2016). Since memorizing what reference a word stands for is a cognitive and linguistic process, then this idea is supported by theory.

Knowing the reference of a word is an activity of creating association between word and world. Semantically, this activity can be called as making sense or making meaning of language. This assumption is supported by Lugossy (in, Fojkar, Skela & Kovac, 2013, p.21) that stories function as schemata on the basis of which we make sense of the world. Through story, teachers can train the students to remember the words used in the story and the referent exist in the world. However, since stories are also fiction, not all words have real referent and this can lead the learning process to failures.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The results discussed in the previous part have led us to the conclusion that can be described briefly:

The participants involved in this research could propose some ideas of how to use story to teach English to young learners. Most of the participants agree that story is beneficial to be used in teaching vocabulary, semantic reference (word-reference matching), and spelling. They wrote that students of young age are interested in story and they are more engaged in the learning process. In some cases, they still rely on the multimedia or non-text story as videos or pictured story-books. This idea shows us that the participants deal with difficulties in dealing young learners without high technology instruments. It can be noticed that the participants are not aware enough that non-native and native English young learners are different in terms of the basic linguistic competence they already have. Therefore, idea like

teaching reading by using story is mentioned. In describing the possible difficulty they may deal in the classroom, the participants are highly aware that the young learners are lacked of focus. This phenomenon is considered as general difficulty that teachers may fight in teaching young learners any subject. Since this research took limited subjects to be involved as participants, the elaboration of the ideas is also limited. Therefore, further research involving more participants in the wider areas and context must be needed.

## References

- Bakhsh, S. A. (2016). Using Games as a Tool in Teaching Vocabulary to Young Learners. *English Language Teaching*; Vol. 9, No. 7; p.120-128.
- Budden, J. (2004). *Using Flash Cards with Young Learners*. Link: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/using-flash-cards-young-learners> retrieved at May, 17th 2017 at 23:43.
- Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Crosse, K. (2007). *Introducing English as an Additional Language to Young Children: A Practical Handbook*. Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Fojkar, M. D., Skela, J., and Kovac, P. (2013). A Study of the Use of Narratives in Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Young Learners. *English Language Teaching*; Vol. 6, No. 6.
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The Practice of English Language Teaching: Fourth Edition*. England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Kalantari, F. and Hashemian, M. (2016). A Story-Telling Approach to Teaching English to Young EFL Iranian Learners. *English Language Teaching*; Vol. 9, No. 1.
- Linse, T. C. (2005). *Practical English Language Teaching: Young Learners*. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- Mart, C. T. (2012). Encouraging Young Learners to Learn English through Stories. *English Language Teaching*; Vol. 5, No. 5, p. 101-106.
- Nunan, D. and Bailey, K. M. (2009). *Exploring Second Language Classroom Research: A Comprehensive Guide*. Heinle Cengage Learning.
- Puskas, A. (2016). *The Challenges and Practices of Teaching Young Learners*. J. Selye University.
- Scott, A. W., and Ytreberg, L. H. (2004). *Teaching English to Children*. New York: Longman.
- Van Scoter, J. (2004). Using Digital Images to Engage Young Learners. *Learning & Leading with Technology*, Vol. 31, No. 8.