

NURTURING TEACHER-STUDENTS' RELATIONSHIP DURING ONLINE TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

Sri Supiah Cahyati¹, Rissa San Rizqiya²

IKIP Siliwangi

Indonesia

¹srisupiahcahyati@ikipsiliwangi.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The relationship of teachers and students in the classroom has been addressed in several reports, but there is still a lack of research on online teaching English to young learners in Indonesia context. By investigating how teachers interact with their students during online learning, the practice of teaching-learning English, and their perceptions of this, this study tackled this void. In this descriptive case study design, 6 participants were recruited, while the data were obtained from observation and semi-structured interview. The results showed that the teachers used the method of grammar translation to interact with the students and promote cognitive engagement, as well as active engagement. The teachers nevertheless claimed that teaching English online was difficult and challenging, although students admitted that they missed the time to visit their teacher in person. Since the teaching-learning process is a social and individual process, it needs a social context and the intense teacher-student relationship is very critical. Therefore, online interactions with intense relationships will stimulate the encouragement, cognitive growth, and creativity of children.

Keywords: Intense relationship, Online TEYL

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic affects policies for school teaching and learning. Some schools also keep studying at home before the New Normal Age, as well as learning English at kindergarten and elementary level in Cimahi, a city in West Java, Indonesia. A survey conducted by UNICEF on May 18-29, 2020 and 5-8 different levels of education in 34 provinces in Indonesia (UNESCO, 2020) reported uncomfortable studying at home during the Covid-19 pandemic because lack of guidance from teachers. On the basis of this issue, the authors carried out a preliminary observation that revealed that many online learning placed more focus on providing tasks/exercises that students have to do with the support of parents, but lack of direct interaction between teachers and students/parents. This issue requires to be further discussed as the lack of intense

interaction will reduce the intellectual development, creativity, and motivation of children.

So far, several studies have investigated the relationships between teachers and students. (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; Tsigilis and Athanasios, 2008; Nugent, 2009; Maldonado-Carreño and Votruba-Drzal, 2011; Petek, 2012; Pianta, 2012; Koca, 2016; Hoque, M. E., 2016; Horn, McCormick, O'Connor, McClowry, Hogan, 2020). Nonetheless, in the Indonesian sense, there remains a lack of research on online teaching English to young learners. The results of previous research have shown that English teachers need knowledge of the management of the classroom to teach English to children. Only a few studies in TEYL (Teaching English to Young Learners) concentrate on intense relationships during online learning (Horn, McCormick, O'Connor, & McClowry,

2020; Azkarai & Kopinska, 2020; Goetz, Bieleke, Gogol, Tartwijk, & Mainhard, 2020; Cahyati, Parmawati, Atmawidjaja, 2019). In attempt to lessen this void, this study addressed this online TEYL problem in the context of Cimahi, Indonesia, by examining how teachers interact with their students during online learning, the practice of teaching-learning process, and how teachers and students/parents view the intense relationship during online TEYL.

Teaching English to Young Learners in the Online Classroom

The learning process is a social and individual process that requires a social context in which learning takes place and it has an impact on the learning of every child. The online teaching-learning process should build a social context like in a traditional classroom environment (Downing, 2007; Wiseman, 2020). For example, teacher still be able to use class routines, such as say hello/singing song, using simple games to review the previous lessons, explain as if in front of the class, make use of what's available, etc. It means communication with students is very important to achieve learning goals. Teachers and parents can never be replaced with any sophisticated technology. Teachers need to read a lot, need to record everything about their students. Build conducive and fair relationships.

The preliminary study conducted by authors showed that in general online learning is still considered to only provide assignments via the internet. In fact, children who learn from home need parental support so that they don't get bored and even stressed during learning from home. In online learning, teachers and parents act as a mentor. Not by feeding children with knowledge, but letting children choose the knowledge themselves. Teachers need to be provided with methods/techniques, knowledge of children psychology, as well as the ability to manage English teaching-

learning process. Eventually, teachers could be more competent and be able to develop children's abilities in English. For students in Kindergarten who usually have an online lesson with a parent guide, the activities should be fun, involving family members (Musthafa, 2010; Mubar, 2015).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study aims to look at how teachers engage with their students during online learning, the practice of teaching-learning practice, and their perceptions of it. For the present study, 6 participants were recruited: a kindergarten teacher, a Fifth grade teacher, a kindergarten student, a Fifth grade student, and 2 student parents as a triangulation. Because of two key criteria, they were recruited: they represent the level of very young learners & young learners, and voluntarily recruited (McMillan, 2005; Suen, Huang, & Lee, 2014). To maintain participants anonymity, the participants were coded as T#1 (teacher in Kindergarten), T#2 (teacher at the 5th grade), S#1 (student at Kindergarten), S#2 (student at 5th grade), P#1 (parent of a student at Kindergarten), P#2 (parent of a student at 5th grade).

This study employed Descriptive Case Study design (Cresswell and Poth, 2018; Tight, 2017; Baxter & Jack, 2010). As stated by Simons (2009) "case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a 'real-life' context." Empirical data were gathered from observation and semi-structured interviews over a period of 6 months. In this study, by joining in the Zoom meeting during the English teaching-learning process, the authors conducted class observation 12 times. The teachers used Zoom and WhatsApp as the media in their online teaching. Data obtained from the observations and interviews were all transcribed and analyzed inductively. To

confirm or disprove them, the authors do not formulate hypotheses and gather data. Instead, the data is obtained first and then inductively synthesized to produce generalizations (McMillan (2005; Cresswell, 2012).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Teacher and Students Interaction during Online Class

Teachers play a very significant role because students have little or no prior knowledge of English at this level and their performance in learning will depend, to some degree, on the creativity of teachers. Successfully teaching children a foreign language requires particular abilities that vary from teaching adults.. The observation showed the teachers used the grammar translation method in teaching. Sentence by sentence, especially in reading or listening to song lyrics, were translated to help students understand the lesson. The teachers also employed referential questions, extended wait time, a series of teacher-initiated exchanges and student-initiated exchanges during teaching-learning process. Overall, the teacher-students' relationship can be seen as the following expression below:

Table 1. The Most Frequent Expression Used by Teachers in Engaging with Students

Opening	Conditioning	Delivering the lesson	Checking students' understanding	Concluding	Closing
Hi... it is good to see you	Are you all ready to study ?	<i>Hari ini kita akan belajar.....</i>	<i>Nah itu dia pembahasan hari ini,</i>	What have we learned	Thank you and see you on

again		"Good luck students" (Convey the title or theme that will be studied, and provide points that must be worked on).	do you understand ? (So that's today's discussion, do you understand ?)	today?	the next meeting.
Assala mualaik um, Good morning students, how are you ?	Sebelum belajar berdo'a dulu dan mengisi absen. Di list kehadiran (Before learning, please pray first and	Today we're going to learn	Is it clear? Do you remember ?	Jadi apakah sudah ? (So in today's lesson, wh	Okay that's enough for today. See you next time.

	fill in the attendance list)			at do we discuss ?)	
Good morning everyone.. how are you today?	Everybody sit down. . sit down. . sit down. . please	I have got something for you	<i>Ada yang kurang jelas boleh bertanya.</i> (Any one who is not understand, please ask)	<i>So, today we have learned</i>	Learning English is fun ...so please practice again at home
Good morning students	Can we start?		Do you understand ? Any question?	What we have learned for today?	Ok. .. That's it for today. I hope everybody enjoyed our activity today

					ay.. . see you tomorrow and have a nice day everyone.
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The class observation found that both teachers used classroom language in English and Indonesia interchangeably in terms of the language used in the interaction between teachers and students. It showed that the interaction most often used by teachers during the teaching-learning process was guiding, teaching, and controlling. For example: they began with Opening the class in Guiding by welcoming the students and asking the condition of the students, then instructed the students to be prepared in Conditioning. They deliver the lesson during teaching by reviewing the previous lesson, then explaining the materials and confirming the understanding of students. Lastly, the teachers summarized the lesson of the day, and eventually closed the lesson. Both teachers argued that online teaching is challenging. Even so, they tried to do their utmost.

The Practice of Online Teaching English to Young Learners

The observation examined the teaching technique practiced by the teachers.

Table 2. The Practice of Online Teaching English to Kindergarten Students

No	Topic	Activity
1	Alphabets	Singing Alphabets song
2	Greetings	Singing Hello song, Practicing Role Play
3	Colours	Flash Cards, TPR, Colouring
4	Animals	Toys, Singing Old Mc Donald song, Game
5	Family	Singing Family song, Role Play

Observation portrayed that T#1 guided students in greeting, then asking and answering questions about name and address. The students were enthusiastic and this technique likely to succeed because they can foster the language acquisition. In the same way, Cameron (2001) discusses how children learn: children are active learners and thinkers, they learn through their actions and exploration, children learn through social interaction, and children construct knowledge through other people and adults. The adult's role is very important in a child's learning process. Like Vygotsky, Bruner (in McCleod, 2019) focuses on the importance of language in children's cognitive development. It illustrates how an adult uses "scaffolding" to control a child's language through great interaction and support the child. T#1 used some activities and more media when teaching. Students at Kindergarten studied the lesson by doing many activities. They increased their vocabulary through Singing, Total Physical Response, Role Play, TPR, made use of toys, etc.

Table 3. The Practice of Online Teaching English to Grade 5 Students

No	Topic	Activity
1	Things in the Classroom	Reading the English book, doing the exercises in the book
2	Things around School	Reading the English book, doing the exercises in the book, question & answer
3	Parts of Body	Reading the English book, doing the exercises in the book, question & answer
4	My Family	Reading the English book, doing the exercises in the book
5	Things at Home	Reading the English book, doing the exercises in the book, question & answer
6	Introducing Oneself	Reading the English book, doing the exercises in the book.
7	Foods and Drinks	Reading the English book, doing the exercises in the book, question & answer

The table above shows T#2 used different techniques while teaching. She only made use the English book as medium by emphasizing on answering the exercises, giving assignments/exercises during the online teaching-learning process. In fact, teaching to young learners may be challenging, rewarding, and even surprising since young learners tend to have boundless physical energy, poor discipline, awareness and short attention spans, a challenging part of teaching was copying with many unexpected events that occur in the classroom each day.

Many teachers feel deflated after their lessons since it was demanding to teach and control the learners' behavior at the same

time (Schneiderová in Garton and Coplan, 2019). The difficulties in learning English may be triggered by several factors. Teacher and learner plays a crucial effect in the process of English language teaching and learning. The use of appropriate approaches, strategies, and methods are some factors which needs to be considered (Zein et al., 2020; Cahyati, Parmawati, Atmawidjaja, 2019, Nunan, 2015; Arian, 2015).

Table 2 and Table 3 describes that T#1 employed more vary exposures and techniques in explaining some topics than T#2. Nevertheless, both teachers have provided challenging and varied learning activities and experiences to motivate students to attain high levels of achievement. They understand the characteristics of young learners, who learn very quickly, but lose interest in learning very quickly as well. A variety of techniques are important because of limited language capacity. Actually, the teacher should consider that students at Kindergarten are in the Pre-Operation stage and those at Elementary school are in the Concrete Operation stage would be more understanding the explanations if the teacher used media in teaching (Brown, 2011). Therefore, it is wise for the teacher to make use of media in explaining the abstract concepts of their students. Facing the student difficulties in learning, the teacher can give more exposures and create more varied activities, for instance using games to meet the language learning objectives while keeping the students actively engaged online.

In line with the characteristics of children and children's cognitive development, children in preschool or primary setting generally learn by way of physical activities or learning by doing (Scott in Jazuly and Indrayani, 2018; Musthafa, 2010). This means that they learn through hands-on experiences and manipulation of objects in the environment.

Children's understanding comes not from the explanation, but from what they see and hear, and crucially, have a chance to touch and interact with (Harmer, 2007). Therefore, an EYL teacher has to pay attention to avoid grammar explanations and rules stated in abstract terms; and should repeat abstract concepts and patterns more often than that of teaching adults. Moreover, the language needs to be context-embedded. Language is abstract, isolated, unconnected sentences will be much less readily tolerated by the children's mind (Brown, 2011). Another characteristic is that children need to have all five senses stimulated. The activities should strive to go well beyond the visual and auditory modes an EYL teacher has to project hands-on activities to go along toward helping children internalize the language.

The class observation also showed that in every class there were always students who have "attention-seeking behaviors" by doing anything not related to the subject of the lesson, making silly faces, changing the position of their laptop/cell phone, etc. To overcome this, Schneiderova (in Garton and Coplan, 2019) suggests that it can be done by: making eye contact and smiling at them, checking their progress, passing a compliment of their attitudes/work, calling on them to share their answer. But if it is in a negative context that can be distracting in learning, the teacher will need to introduce prevention measures such as asking questions to attract their attention, warning them, or setting up a meeting with their parents. But if it is in a negative context that can be distracting in learning, the teacher will need to introduce prevention measures such as asking questions to attract their attention, warning them, or setting up a meeting with their parents. In this study, both teachers just smiled, called their names, and asked them to concentrate on the lesson.

The Perception of Teacher, Students, and Parents

The data from the interview elaborated this issue. The result can be seen as follow:

Table 4. The Perceptions toward Online English Learning

No	Participants	Perception
1	T#1	online teaching is challenging, still have problems in making interactions with students, used English and Indonesian interchangeably in the interaction with the students to make the students understand better
2	T#2	should be well prepared, still have problems in making relationship with students, used English and Indonesian to help the students understand the lesson
3	S#1	Want to speak English since the first lesson, boredom, want to meet the teacher in person
4	S#2	expected to be awarded by parents and friends by being able to speak English, have problems with either the internet connection or unclear explanation from the teacher, frustrated, wanted to have offline class and meet the teacher and friends.
5	P#1	the lack of teacher interaction with parents, T#1 never gave any

		exercises since the students did it during the teaching-learning process,
6	P#2	T#2 tended to always give exercises to students, but less interaction with parents.

It reveals that both teachers argued that online teaching is challenging. Even so, they tried to do their utmost by encouraging the students because they easily lose their focus when learning. The data from the interview elaborated both teachers argued that online teaching is challenging. S#1 and S#2 expected to be able to speak some English after the first lesson so that they awarded by their parents and their friends. Actually, learning a foreign language needs exposures directly from the teachers. Using English in the classroom language between teacher-students plays a key role in encouraging students' language skills (Zein et al., 2020; Scott and Ytreberg, 1990; Read, 2003). When language learning begins earlier, it can go on longer and provide more practice and experience. Furthermore, younger is better when learning is natural, contextualized and part of a real event (Read, 2003). Using English in the classroom language between teacher-students plays a key role in encouraging students' language skills, moreover for young learners (Diem, 2011; Pinter, 2017; Garton and Coplan, 2019; Huitt & Hummel, 2003).

Furthermore, lack of intense interaction can limit children's cognitive development, creativity, and motivation. The important point in online teaching is to instill a feeling in students that there is a teacher's presence and the teacher is paying attention and motivating them (Pianta and Stuhlman, 2004; Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta & Howes, 2002). Failure to feel connected to a teacher may lead to students' boredom in turn. Designing and

delivering online learning is not just a matter of selecting teachers with subject matter expertise and/or technical skills, but also teachers with pedagogical, information and communication skills (Pianta and Stuhlman, 2004; (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta & Howes, 2002; Goetz, Bieleke, Gogol, Tartwijk, Mainhard, Lipnevich, Pekrun, 2021; Christenson, S. L., Reschly, A. L., & Wylie, C. (Eds.), 2012; Wubbels et al., 2015; McPherson and Nunes, 2004). Building positive relationships with students in classroom is extremely important. Once a bond is established it will help children achieve their best. As teacher spend a lot of time with students, it's important to get closer with them.

CONCLUSION

Previous researches are more focused on the offline learning experience where students and teachers meet face to face. This research addressed this gap as there was a lack of insight on this matter. The result revealed that teachers used the Grammar Translation method to engage with students, in class interaction, and clarifying the lessons. Regarding the practice of online teaching, teacher at Kindergarten employed more varied activities in teaching than teacher at Elementary school. In response to this issue, teachers should be aware that it is important for the teacher to provide varied media and diverse learning activities and experiences to motivate students to achieve high levels of achievement.

Eventually, both teachers claimed that online teaching is challenging and they still have problems in making good interactions with students. Nevertheless, both teachers always encourage the students to concentrate on the lesson and do their best. Since in online learning the students can not physically meet the teachers and lack of physical interaction, teachers should know students as individual, be provided with subject matter expertise and/or technical skills, and communication skills as well. To

nurture students during online learning, teachers should show empathy, compassion, and engage students in a collaborative and engaging virtual community. Ask them to play English movies and games that teach them English skills. Send them links which include interesting learning materials, not just homework. Teacher can create a supportive atmosphere for English teaching by maintaining this, and can provide children with quality, fulfilling learning experiences. Thus, children's verbal and cognitive abilities may develop properly. Lastly, concerning some limitation of this study, the other researcher may pursue the same issue in different study settings, more participants, and longer observation.

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