



Do The Children Need To Learn English at Elementary Level?

Vitri Angraini Hardi¹, Lusi Marleni²

Universitas Pahlawan Tuanku Tambusai, Riau, Indonesia^{1,2}

E-mail: vitriangraini@universitaspahlawan.ac.id¹, lusimarleni@universitaspahlawan.ac.id²

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memberikan gambaran tentang pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris di sekolah dasar (SD). Keberadaan Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing yang diadopsi ke dalam kurikulum pembelajaran di Indonesia sehubungan terjadinya pergeseran status pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris pada SD adalah merupakan suatu kajian penelitian yang menarik. Kurikulum 2013 dengan jelas menyatakan bahwa pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris di sekolah dasar di Indonesia ditetapkan sebagai mata pelajaran tambahan. Hal ini dapat diartikan bahwa pemerintah Indonesia tidak mewajibkan siswa/i sekolah dasar untuk belajar mata pelajaran Bahasa Inggris. Sekolah memiliki kesempatan untuk memilih mengadopsi pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai suatu mata pelajaran yang harus disediakan atau tidak disediakan. Kebijakan yang diambil pemerintah untuk memulai kewajiban mempelajari Bahasa Inggris pada tingkat Sekolah Menengah Pertama (SMP) adalah atas dasar usia matang yang dibutuhkan ketika mempelajari bahasa asing. Terkait pernyataan tersebut, peneliti memutuskan untuk melakukan suatu kajian analisis. Penelitian terdahulu menemukan bahwa pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris akan lebih bagus dilakukan pada saat anak berada pada usia dini dikarenakan gaya belajar yang dimiliki cenderung bersifat meniru (imitasi). Keadaan pembelajar yang dimaksud dianggap sebagai tahapan yang mampu memudahkan anak belajar bahasa asing. Penelitian yang lain secara kontra menyatakan bahwa pembelajaran bahasa asing baik dimulai pada pembelajar dewasa karena belajar bahasa tidak hanya sekedar kemampuan meniru tetapi juga pelibatan aspek kebahasaan lainnya. Sejalan dengan fakta – fakta penelitian yang telah disampaikan, secara umum kedua pemikiran yang berbeda dari segi usia pembelajar memiliki satu asumsi yang secara pasti sama. Permasalahan belajar bahasa bukanlah permasalahan pembelajar saja. Beberapa faktor lainnya memberikan pengaruh terhadap keberhasilan suatu pembelajaran bahasa asing. Sehubungan dengan tingkat usia pembelajar, pembelajaran bahasa asing akan berhasil jika disesuaikan dengan gaya dan tingkat usia siswa. Pembelajar usia dini akan lebih cocok diberikan pembelajaran yang membantu mengali kemampuan berbicara dan mendengarkan. Sementara pembelajar dewasa akan lebih baik kegiatan pembelajaran bahasa inggris yang diberikan berupa kegiatan menulis dan membaca. Hal ini dikarenakan perbedaan tingkat pemikiran dalam proses pembelajaran.

Kata kunci: Tingkatan usia, pembelajaran bahasa asing, sekolah dasar

Abstrak

This aim of this research is to provide an insight on English as foreign language learning at elementary school level. Since the English is learned as foreign language in Indonesia, the shifting of English in Indonesia curriculum is one of the interested research focus. It is explicitly declared in Curriculum 2013 that English is taught as an extracurricular subject in Indonesia elementary school. The government does not obligate the elementary students to learn English. The elementary schools have an opportunity to decide English to be included as a subject in the curriculum. The shifting of the government's consideration in deciding the starting focus of English learning at junior high school level is the maturity level of learners in learning a foreign language. Dealing with the stated focus, a critical overview on the foreign language learning is conducted. Several research reported that learning a foreign language is better to be started at the early age because of the early age students are easier to imitate the new language. The way of thinking in imitating stages is assumed as the best time to start learning a foreign language. In another point, several research reported that maturity level of learners is the essential point to be considered because learning a foreign language need is not only imitating the language but also understanding the culture, combining linguistics aspects and so on. Despite the fact on the different views of scholars, both of the parties agree on the focus of learning a language is not a matter of age. The contributions of several factors are also part of the supported system in learning foreign language. In term of English foreign language learning, different age-level have to be given different learning input. An early age students should be given speaking and listening topics due to the students do not involve the critical thinking process. Meanwhile, the mature students are better to be provided reading and writing topic due to the depth thinking phase is in theirs.

Keywords: Age-level, foreign language learning, elementary level

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✉ Corresponding author :

Address : -

Email : -

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INTRODUCTION

Perceived as a Global Language Franca in which estimated to determine the future success in global competition, a growing awareness of English has attracted several sectors, similarly in Education. The highly demand driven from the parents and teachers affects the government to decide English to be a local content subject in National curriculum in several countries. The starting year of the English learning in school environment is different one another.

Zhang (cites in Su, 2006) states that Taiwan has introduced English since 1949 in the secondary level. The students are giving six hours (one 300 – min lesson) per week during two 20-week semester in each school year. In 1990s a growing numbers of demanding driven from students' parents and educators to promote English learning at elementary level in response to Economic Globalization. A Growing number of parents send the children to learn English in a private institution even in charm school after school to help them to proficient earlier in English. The parents do expect the children to have greater competition globally in the future (Su, 2006).

English education in South Korea has been started at the third grade of Elementary level since 1997 (Katsuyama, Nishigaki, & Wang, 2008). It is similar in Turkey (Kocaman & Cansız, 2012). In 1997, Turkish Educational through Ministry of National Education required foreign language learning begins at grade 4 in elementary school level. Kocaman & Cansız (2012) state that the decision is aimed at reaching the basic goals that to be proficiently in foreign language communication.

In Indonesia, the decision of promoting English learning is pioneered by the students' parents, teachers and administrators during the meetings in Malang regency, East Java in 1985. The results of the meeting is supported by the quick response given by the local Educational in Malang to accelerate English education as an extracurricular subject at 352 elementary schools (Zein, 2017). In the four year later, in 1989, Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) conducted a nation-wide survey on English teaching and learning involving parents, teachers and students of public and private secondary school. The survey reported that several elite schools in some cities admitted that English as extracurricular subject is one of the successful key of school performance. The 1989 national survey followed up by MoEC through national symposium on Education in 1992 drawing up the conclusion on recommendation of English teaching at elementary school to the government. The government through MoEC released decree No 060/U/1993 in relating to English teaching at elementary school with the following considerations as follows: 1)the societies in which the school is located requires it, and 2) the qualified teachers and supporting facilities to accommodate proper teaching and learning is facilitated Sadtono (cites in Zein, 2017).

Following by the decision on promoting English education in several Asian countries, Japan in 2002 declared the decision on English learning at public elementary school as an optional subject. As a result, the English hours differs from one to another. Katsuyama et al. (2008) reported that some schools regulate English teaching 2

classes per week, some others are not. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology claims that on average, each school learn English once in a month.

Refers to the pioneer of English education in several Asian countries and the students' parents, educators, and teachers' demanding on the importance of English, the ideas of implementing English education is highly suggested to begin at elementary level education. (Su, 2006) states that proponents of English elementary instruction have ensured that early age learners are good starting to learn English. The earlier exposure and stimulation can help students to enhance language skills as well as develop cross-cultural skills.

Dealing with the age-related in learning second language, several arguments has been merged up. Satienchayakorn (2017) states that since 1960s, some scholars had attracted to conduct several research on Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The research reported the distinction of the linguists view on age-related in SLA. Some linguists prefer suggested the later learner is the better, while some others state that the younger the better. Ahmed (cites in Satienchayakorn, 2017) say that early age learners have Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH). Within the critical period, learning a language is done in a natural way through much exposure to it without formal instruction; as a result, the learning will occur unconsciously and rapidly. The students are getting involved in the learning without structurally design the learning process by certain instructions. Another thing related to CPH is the plasticity and feasibility of the children's brain are

the factors for fast and unconscious learning of both first and second languages.

On the contrary, linguists are also suggested that SLA is related on the maturity. SLA as part of foreign language learning cannot be considered naturally adapted. It is not a matter of adopting and using the language. The learners need full concentration and functions of human brain. The more mature the individual the better function of the brain they have. The linguists believe that the high focus of brain determine the success of foreign language learning.

Due to the distinction on the linguists' view of the better foreign language learning process, a critical overview is necessary to be conducted. The research will criticize several research in the past in order to response the policy on the changing of English learning shifting in the Indonesia elementary school curriculum.

METHOD

This is a meta-analysis research. The researcher conducted review on the international articles related to foreign language learning in Asian Countries. The focus of the research is gaining on the linguists, scholars, and researchers' views on the foreign language learning. The underlying consideration is the phenomenon on the response given by future English Teachers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Generally, learning a foreign language is getting involved several factors. It is not only focus on the students- age related issue. Since a language is not a science focus, a brain development is not gives much contribution in the process.

The term Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) on early age learners and maturity on later age learners are not the focus issue on SLA. A language learning process is purely related to the language input contribute to the students. In other words, it should not be debated related to the best time to start foreign language learning. Ideally, for effective language learning to occur, a stimulating and rich linguistic environment is required (Winskel et al., 2016).

The nature of early age learners as the individual demands them to be closely and actively engaged in the target of learning. The students should be closely touched with the learning focus. The students will be easily understand and fluent in using the language if the students get much exposure to the language. It is happen in acquiring the first language. In receiving the first language, the students are exposed to use the language from the parents, and the people surrounding. The rich exposure gives them fast way to adopt and imitate the language. To get a review on the foreign language learning issues, several research has been reviewed.

Winskel et al., 2016 reported the research findings on Second Language Learning as follows:

1. The early childhood years represent a critical period in learning and development. During these first few years young children develop language and other cognitive skills at a very rapid pace. At this age, children are also very receptive to learning a second language.
2. If children learn a second language at an early age, they are more likely to be able to pronounce foreign language words similar to a native speaker and eventually learn the complex grammatical system of the second language.
3. Moreover, there are potential benefits for children learning a second language in terms of enhanced executive and cognitive function including metalinguistic awareness (e.g., Bialystok, 1999; Bialystok, 2001; Bialystok & Viswanathan, 2009).
4. Through learning a second language, children also learn about other cultures and increase their cultural awareness and understanding of different cultural practices and behaviours, and thus, become more appreciative of diversity and different cultures through this experience. This experience of learning a second or foreign language in the important early childhood years sets the seed for growth, future development and engagement in learning a second language.
5. Ideally, for effective language learning to occur, a stimulating and rich linguistic environment is required. Thus, children need to be given many opportunities to be actively engaged and interact with others, as occurs when learning the first language. This can be quite a challenge in the foreign language classroom, as typically children learning a second language in a foreign language context have little exposure to the language outside of the classroom. One way to remedy this is to utilise the new technologies to enhance learning by giving children opportunities to interact and engage with native speakers.
6. Children, typically, acquire their first language (L1) while being actively engaged,

exploring their environment and interacting with others.

7. Through interacting and communicating with other members of their culture, they gradually acquire not only linguistic competence, the vocabulary and the rules or grammar of the language, but also communicative competence, the rules associated with using the language appropriately in different socio-cultural contexts. Language is inherently interconnected with culture.
8. By about four or five years of age, children have typically developed into skilled communicators in their native language and at the same time have become enculturated into their particular socio-cultural group.
9. In contrast, when learning a language as a foreign language, there are many significant challenges as children do not experience the same conducive interactive environment as when learning their first language.
10. In the foreign language classroom, children need to be given opportunities to be actively engaged and have rich interactive communicative activities, similar to what occurs when learning the first language. This is a significant challenge to the early childhood teacher.

Larson-Hall (2008) reported the research findings into several points as follows:

1. Lay people may assume that the robust finding of 'younger is better' applies to second language acquisition in all situations. However, all the critical period studies which show that 'younger is better' have been conducted with immigrant populations, in

which child learners were immersed in the target language environment and presumably spent a large percentage of their waking hours being exposed to the second language in school.

2. Some researchers have argued that age effects would not be expected to appear in situations of minimal input because critical period effects are only seen in naturalistic or immersion classroom settings.
3. Munoz (2001) posits that earlier starters cannot gain the positive effects of an early start if there is insufficient input for the kind of implicit learning that is done by children, while they are not cognitively advanced enough yet to benefit from explicit methods of instruction.
4. Older studies, conducted in the 1970s, also concluded that there was little linguistic advantage to beginning study of a second language earlier in a minimal input situation. Oller and Nagato (1974) examined Japanese students who began studying English in elementary school (1–2 hours a week) and compared them to peers who began English study in junior high only. Using a cloze test, the two groups were tested in 7th, 9th and 11th grades. The authors found statistical differences between the two groups in the lower two grades but not in 11th grade, and they concluded that the younger starters' advantages had disappeared by that point.

Caner, 2010 propose several arguments based on his findings as follows:

1. Considering the research on child's language development and foreign

language education, Muro and Kottman (1995) point out that, primary school children have the high ability to learn a foreign language.

2. It is a global fact that learning and knowing a foreign language fulfill a person's occupational needs, bring new insights into his/her world view, and make the person open-minded and tolerant. Considering the fact about the benefits of learning a foreign language, the implementation of foreign language classes into early phases of primary education began to take place in most of the European countries and in the USA in the early 1960s.

Satienchayakorn (2017) argues several statements related to foreign language learning. It is divided into three points of views.

A. Viewpoints The Later The Better

1. The linguists supporting this view argue that children should not be given any input at the early stage; rather, they should be allowed to learn anything including their first language naturally.
2. In addition, foreign language learning is not considered a natural learning. It involves full concentration and functions of a human brain, so the linguists suggest that the children should wait until their brain is fully developed, and all kinds of learning including a foreign language can take place with high possibility of successful results.
3. Kindergarten students, school students, and university students are totally different

in terms of brain development. The higher the level individuals move to in their schools, the better they are at learning difficult subjects.

B. Viewpoints The Younger The Better

1. Most beliefs trust that younger children are better at acquiring a second language than adults based on the fact that a child's brain functions have more ability to absorb more information and learn new things as a progress of development growth.
2. This ability of children's brains to acquire a new language easily is called 'Critical Period Hypothesis'(CPH).
3. The linguists who support the CPH believe that brain plasticity and flexibility in children are the factors for fast and unconscious learning of both first and second languages.
4. Therefore, all kinds of learning must take place at this stage; otherwise, it will be too difficult when the brain becomes inflexible in adulthood. (Palea & Boștină-Bratu, 2015).
5. Ahmed in (Satienchayakorn, 2017) posits that the critical period is a biologically determined period of life, mainly about puberty, when a language can be acquired most easily, but if it is beyond this stage, it will become difficult to master it. Within the critical period, learning a language is done in a natural way through much exposure to it without formal instruction; as a result, the learning will occur unconsciously and rapidly.

C. Viewpoint Of Other Supporting

1. The language faculty in children and adults are just the same. What differs is 'affective factors' such as low self-esteem, confidence, and social distance. He also suggests that children learn a foreign language better than adults because when they have more time to play around in a real situation, then they learn the foreign language unconsciously (Ahmed, 2008). It is difficult to say whether a critical period (which according to Paradis (1999) ranges between 2-13 years of age) really happens by giving a different view, "it is much more difficult to predict knowledge or ability in any of the other areas of communicative competence (syntax, cohesion, sociolinguistics, etc.) based on age of acquisition" (Archibald, 2005, as cited in Bista, 2008, p. 12).

Scholars and Researchers have been argued on the view of age-related issue on foreign or second language learning. It can be said that the age-related issue is not the factors determine the success of students' achievement in term of fluency and proficiency in English. The focus on the language learning is to enrich the language input to the students. The learning input have to be suited with the students' age. Students' age is the factors that need to be considered by the teacher as learning designer to have them to engage in a rich learning activities.

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