

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Review

1. Definitions of Young Learners

Young learners are primary school-aged children, typically between the ages of five and twelve. Their language and cognitive abilities improve as they mature. Cameron (2001) explained that age influences how children learn languages. Younger children (7-8 years old) are more concerned with sounds and rhythm, whereas older children (12-14 years old) are more concerned with word order. According to Shin and Crandall (2014), children aged 5 to 12 grow and develop rapidly. Scott and Ytreberg (1990) classified young learners into two age ranges: 5-7 years and 8-10 years. The younger group is typically comprised of beginners, but the elder group may include beginners or those who have started studying a foreign language, meaning their levels may vary. Pinter (2011) noted that as children grow older, they become better at understanding word meanings. By the age of 10-11, they may acquire new words simply by being given a definition. To summarize, young learners are typically 6-12 years old in primary school. They are in a rapid stage of physical, cognitive, and language development, with learning characteristics varying based on age and prior experience with language acquisition.

2. Characteristics of Young Learners

Pinter (2017) emphasizes that young learners differ significantly from older learners in terms of their cognitive, social, emotional, and linguistic development, which impacts how they acquire and process new language. According to Cameron (2001), young learners acquire language differently from adults due to their developing thought processes and limited metalinguistic awareness, which means they learn best through contextualized and interactive activities rather than explicit language rules. Harmer (2007) emphasizes that young learners are active, curious, and imaginative, making them more responsive to play-based learning, stories,

and physical activities. Shin and Crandall (2014) further highlight that young learners are:

- a. Energetic and physically active
- b. Spontaneous and not afraid to speak out and participate
- c. Curious and receptive to new ideas
- d. Imaginative and enjoys making-believe
- e. Easily distracted and have short attention spans
- f. Egocentric and relate new ideas to themselves
- g. Social and learning to relate to others

In language learning, children are classified based on their cognitive, emotional, and linguistic development. Scott and Ytreberg (1990) categorize them into two age groups: 5-7 years old (Level 1) and 8-10 years old (Level 2). Level one students are communicative, love sharing experiences, planning activities, and expressing their opinions through logical thinking. They have active imaginations, engage in playful activities, and frequently rely on context to understand meaning, even though their language skills are still developing. Despite their intuitive language use, students have limited attention spans, requiring a variety of stimulating tasks. Meanwhile, level two learners possess a more developed language system, can distinguish between reality and fantasy, and demonstrate curiosity by asking questions. They begin to take responsibility for their learning, have a stronger sense of fairness, and can express ideas more clearly. They also build social skills and collaborate effectively. As a result, teachers must understand their needs and use engaging teaching methods.

3. How Young Learners Learn Language

Young learners acquire language naturally through interaction, play, and meaningful experiences, rather than relying on strict grammatical instruction. According to Scott and Ytreberg (1990), young learners learn holistically, noticing patterns and noises before completely comprehending rules. Curiosity, inventiveness, and interaction with their surroundings motivate them to pursue their studies. They rely extensively on context,

body language, and visual aids to acquire meaning, often comprehending situations more quickly than the language used to explain them. Repetition and routines reinforce learning by creating a sense of security and familiarity. They also benefit from actively participating in activities such as singing, storytelling, role-playing, and games, which make language acquisition fun and memorable. Social engagement is essential because young learners learn best when communicating with their teachers and peers. Their ability to utilize language frequently develops before they are consciously aware. Therefore, exposure to rich and varied language input is crucial.

Shin and Crandall (2014) highlight that young learners learn language most effectively through active participation, interaction, and meaningful experiences in their environment. Their approach is based on the belief that learning by doing through hands-on activities and real-life contexts enhances language acquisition. This experiential learning helps young learners acquire new vocabulary and structures as they actively participate in language-rich tasks. Furthermore, teachers can help young learners learn languages more naturally and effectively by creating an immersive, engaging, and supportive atmosphere. In conclusion, young learners learn language more efficiently through natural interaction, play, and meaningful experiences than formal grammar teaching. They construct meaning by combining context, repetition, and social interaction. Participating in real-life and interactive activities allows students to acquire vocabulary and language structures in a supportive and engaging environment.

4. Principles of Teaching English to Young Learners

English learning principles for young learners are important because children learn naturally through direct experience, interaction, and fun activities. Teachers can create an engaging learning environment by applying the correct principles, adapting methods to children's learning styles, and providing appropriate support. This makes learning more effective and meaningful, increasing young learners' motivation and

confidence in language. According to Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, active learning is crucial for children to learn English effectively. Piaget (1936) argues that children learn language naturally through interaction with their environment, not just through passive instruction from the teacher. In English language learning, active learning means that children should be directly involved in activities that allow them to explore, experiment, and construct their understanding of language. For example, they can learn through games, songs, storytelling, role-playing, and project-based activities that encourage them to use language in real-life situations.

Piaget (1936) also mentions in the Piagetian Stages that there are four main stages that must be considered. Firstly, the sensorimotor stage (0-2 years) is characterized by children learning through direct experience with their senses and movements, and beginning to understand the concept of permanent objects. Second stage: Preoperational stage (2-7 years), children begin to use symbols such as words and pictures, but are still egocentric and cannot think logically. Third stage: Concrete operational stage (7-11 years), children begin to think more logically, understand the concept of conservation, and can solve problems with the help of concrete objects. In the last stage, the Formal operational stage (11 years and above), children begin to think abstractly, understand hypothetical concepts, and can reason logically without the aid of real objects. These stages demonstrate that children's thinking develops gradually, so learning methods, including English, should be adapted to their stage of cognitive development. Applying active learning principles makes English learning more effective, fun, and aligned with children's cognitive development.

Vygotsky (1978) introduced another learning principle. In his view, the primary goals of children's English language learning should be social interaction, scaffolding, and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Teachers must provide their students with challenges suitable for their developmental stage since ZPD is the range between what young learners

can learn independently and what they can achieve with assistance from others. Another essential concept is scaffolding or gradual support. Under this method, teachers or peers facilitate language acquisition by providing guidance, support, or examples. Vygotsky (1978) also underlined that social interaction (such as role-playing, group projects, and discussions) is the primary way language is learned and enables young learners to learn from one another.

Moreover, Shin and Crandall (2014) believe that effective English learning for young learners should be engaging, collaborative, and meaningful. Children are kept engaged and motivated to learn through fun and interesting activities. Exchanges such as pair work, group exercises, and class debates enable young learners to practice language in various circumstances. Because children have various learning styles and intelligences, teachers should employ auditory, visual, and kinesthetic approaches to ensure all students benefit. Making language learning entertaining and relevant by linking it to real-life occurrences helps young learners retain and comprehend new concepts.

5. Stages of Teaching English to Young Learners

Teaching English to young learners requires strategies that align with their developmental characteristics and learning needs. According to Shin and Crandall (2014), several essential stages can help create a compelling and enjoyable English learning environment for children. These stages emphasize the importance of using meaningful, interactive, and age-appropriate activities that foster language development and learner engagement. The following key practices highlight the recommended stages in teaching English to young learners based on their study:

a. Use fun and engaging activities.

Young learners should enjoy learning English to stay motivated and engaged. Activities such as role-playing, games, storytelling, and music can help them learn without feeling overwhelmed, thereby boosting their enthusiasm for learning and participation.

- b. Students are engaged in a variety of interactions.

Young learners should be allowed to speak in various contexts, including role-playing, group conversations, and pair work. By actively engaging in interactions, they can learn from their peers and improve their speaking and listening abilities.

- c. Cater to different learning styles and intelligences.

Each child learns differently, whether they are kinesthetic (doing), visual (seeing), or auditory (hearing). Teachers should employ various teaching strategies to ensure that every kid learns well, such as using songs for auditory learners, movement exercises for kinesthetic learners, and pictures for visual learners.

- d. Make language learning meaningful and relevant.

Learning should be connected to the child's everyday life to make English simpler to comprehend and retain. Children can be taught food language by role-playing as buyers and sellers in a store, for instance, or by connecting lessons to their experiences.

- e. Introduce learners to different cultures.

Learning English is not only about vocabulary and grammar, but also about understanding the culture of native speakers. Teachers can introduce the cultures of different English-speaking countries through stories, songs, festivals, and specialities so that children have a broader global outlook.

- f. Use various teaching strategies that set up learners for success.

Various teaching techniques, such as project-based learning, modelling, and scaffolding, help children feel more confident in learning a language. Teachers must also provide positive feedback and adjust challenges according to children's abilities to motivate them.

B. Study of the Relevant Research

Several researchers have investigated the portrayal of English language teaching in Indonesia, with a focus on primary schools. Previous research concentrated on how English is taught to young students in primary schools. The

study also examined teachers' classroom experiences, highlighting the opportunities and obstacles they face. These studies offer valuable insights into the practice of English teaching at the primary level, highlighting the need for ongoing support and training for teachers to effectively instruct young learners in English. Chodhori and Diastama (2024) investigate English teaching methods in Indonesian elementary schools, focusing on addressing the learning needs of Generation Z. Data were collected in two phases: classroom observations and teacher interviews. The study identifies several key challenges, such as limited teaching time, insufficient resources, and a need for more engaging approaches. Although the school adopts the Cambridge curriculum, it also incorporates aspects of Indonesia's Merdeka curriculum. To improve student engagement, the study recommends using interactive activities like games. In summary, the findings highlight the importance of adapting teaching methods to meet modern student preferences and creating a learning environment that fosters effective English language acquisition.

According to Herayana and Suryaningsih (2025), the challenges teachers face when teaching English are discussed. The conclusion drawn by the researchers is that they found challenges and shortcomings in teaching English in Indonesia. This study examines the challenges faced by English teachers in primary schools in Central Lombok and outlines strategies to address them. Major obstacles include inadequate teaching resources, socioeconomic inequalities, and large class sizes, all of which negatively impact the effectiveness of English teaching. Teachers must also navigate varying student proficiency levels, cultural traditions favouring rote memorization, and a lack of professional collaboration. The findings emphasize the urgent need for professional development initiatives that promote culturally responsive teaching practices and address classroom linguistic diversity. Additionally, fostering collaborative networks among educators and strengthening community engagement are proposed to better connect global English standards with local cultural realities. By implementing these strategies, the study advocates for targeted efforts to improve the quality of English education and learning outcomes in Central Lombok's primary education system.

Another study, conducted by Kurniawati and Atmojo (2025), investigated the views and behaviours of four Indonesian primary school teachers in implementing Content and Language-Integrated Learning (CLIL) and their teaching experiences. The findings indicated that CLIL is beneficial for improving both English and content subject skills. They emphasised the importance of meaningful and engaging teaching given students' different levels of English proficiency and motivation. Teachers' colleagues and school stakeholders were viewed as critical sources of support. CLIL was used in mathematics, science, civics, and social science, while others were taught in Bahasa Indonesia. English was the primary instructional language, and school programs aimed to increase its use. Teachers requested improved facilities and more time for professional growth and preparation. The study emphasises the importance of strong teacher competencies and long-term institutional support for successful CLIL implementation.

Unlike previous research, this research focused on providing a real current of how English language learning occurs in primary schools. This research examines various aspects of the learning process, including teacher preparation before lessons, the methods used to deliver material, and the interactions between teachers and students. By applying this approach, the research aims to examine how teachers teach English to young learners, considering the learners' characteristics, including their needs, interests, and learning styles, as well as describing the teaching methods and strategies employed at the primary school level. Thus, this study focuses on teachers' teaching practices while exploring the suitability of the techniques used in relation to the characteristics of early-age students. Hopefully, this study contributes new findings that support the need for English language teaching at the primary level.