

Effective Interaction Strategies in Teaching and Learning of English for Preschool Children

Mazlina Che Mustafa, Maznah Ahmad

Department of Early Education, Faculty of Education & Human Development, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjung Malim, Malaysia.

Email: mazlina.cm@fpm.upsi.edu.my

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Abstract

This study aims to identify effective English interaction strategies during teaching and learning sessions by preschool teachers in Kerian District, Perak. This study also identifies teachers' pedagogical skills in teaching and learning of English and the use of reinforcement and encouragement as a motivation for children to interact in English. Qualitative approach with case study design have been chosen in this study. The purposive sampling involves five preschool teachers who attended a series of English language proficiency courses in 2014. Three research instruments employed were interviews, observations and document analysis. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings highlight that the use of opportunities provided by the teachers and effective strategies such as repetition, bilingual use and parallel talk can increase English interaction among preschool children. The study concludes that the use of various effective strategies, teachers' pedagogical skills and the use of reinforcement and encouragement can enhance English interaction. The implication of this study may create awareness on the significance of preschool teachers to share their interaction skills and vary effective interaction strategies in English to improve the quality of teaching and learning for preschool children.

Keywords: Effective Interactions Strategies, Teaching English, Young Children, Motivation, Second Language

Introduction

Education in Malaysia as stated in National Education Philosophy emphasizes holistic approach which covers physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual aspects. Today, preschool education has been a major agenda in the National Education. It is one of the sub agenda under the NKRA after the government realized the effectiveness of early childhood education in all aspects especially in cognitive development. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has designed a suitable concept to be implemented in preschool learning through The National Preschool Curriculum Standard (KSPK).

From this level, a child can be nurtured to be an ideal individual. The implementation of preschool to all children before they enter the schooling period contributes to the educational development and this will help the teachers in the classroom. Children are able to absorb the

skills that a being taught by the teacher (Arshad, 2009). It is the beginning of education world which can lead to positive impact to their growth.

Children especially in the preschool are sensitive with their environment and are able to learn variety of languages at the same time. Therefore, teacher should grab this opportunity and find a suitable approach, method and strategy to guide and provide an effective and fun learning to them.

The use of English language in daily life is crucial in accordance to the educational development in Malaysia. The implementation of "MBMMBI" policy has been done in stages starting 2010. The main aim to strengthen English and to enhance the English mastery as it is compulsory to be learned as a means of communication and also known as a language for knowledge at the national and international levels. Each student needs to be proficient in English in order to enable them to explore the world of knowledge as they need to compete in the national and international levels (Bujang, 2010).

Therefore, English language mastery should start from preschool whereby they have been exposed with this international language. Preschool teacher needs to adjust in interpreting this policy in their teaching. English language is as important as Malay language because both have given the same duration in the timetable which is 600 minutes per week (KSPK, 2010). The role of teacher is more important in the implementation of English in preschool.

Background of the Study

Malaysian government pays a great attention to the English language mastery among Malaysian students. English has been made compulsory in both primary and secondary schools. In line with its importance, English has been taught to all children as early as preschool in order to ensure the English mastery in the higher level.

In the National Preschool Curriculum Standard (NPCS, 2010), it is clearly stated that English should be the basic for the students. NPCS approach emphasises the use of suitable teaching and learning strategies and methods according to the learners' age, development, ability, talent and interests. This is considered as the opportunity for the children to learn and master English in fun way.

The exposure in learning English among the preschool children will serve as an early experience for them in English communication. This will act as a meaningful learning that will contribute to their confidence in cultivating positive attitude before they enter lifelong formal education.

For preschool, English is being taught through both verbal and non-verbal such as body language, facial expression and eye contact in order to ensure the children are able to understand the languages. All these elements are important in interaction strategy used by the teachers in exposing their students with English.

An effective interaction between teachers and students is a two-way relationship which influences one another. Children are able to understand teacher's utterances and they will respond during the learning process. The latest study carried out by Fredson (2015) found that supportive interaction will increase children's motivation and will make them more interested in learning the language. Marguerite (1990) stated that the effectiveness of a

teaching and learning process relies on the students' involvement and positive interaction with their teachers.

Statement of the Problem

Nowadays, inability to master English among primary, secondary and tertiary students are alarming and this has been paid a great attention because this will lead to the inefficiency of other knowledge mastery since many reference books are written in English. Education Act 1996 (Ministry of Education, 1996) stated that language education is compulsory in all early education programmes. However, there is no clear definition on how this second language can be used as an interaction tool in early childhood's teaching and learning process. Thus, the impact is not visible.

In January 2014, in Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015 – 2025 (Higher Education) dialogue, the former Malaysian Education Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yasin claimed that Malaysian students in preschool, primary, secondary, pre-university and university still could not speak English properly. This is alarming because English has been taught since they are small. He agreed that the teaching of English should start from preschool thus these students can enhance their language skills as they grow up.

The Ministry of Education with the collaboration with Cambridge English has conducted a study on Malaysian schools "*Measuring the English Language Standard and Establishing an evidence-based base line for Malaysian schools*". The purpose of the study was to investigate the level of teaching and learning English. According to the study, 85 percent of the students are interested in learning English and 97 percent of the teachers love to teach the language. Since the statistics showed higher interest in learning English, there is a need to investigate on why does the level of mastery in English language still low.

Teachers are responsible in preparing the students with English communication skills as a preparation before they start schooling. Teachers also need to digest the content before they deliver to the students because the students themselves could not understand English yet. According to Albert (2012) in his study on preschool, it was found that the teaching and learning process is unsuccessful because the students could not understand what the teachers are trying to convey.

Therefore, the students chose to keep quiet and waited for the answer from the teachers. In addition, preschool teachers found that it is difficult for the teachers to interact with their students in English as they are not majoring in English. They were not professionally trained as English teachers. Hence, the teachers could not be able to carry out tasks and activities in the classrooms successfully due to their lack of competence in English. Rohaty (2013) stated that one of the popular findings in the study of English language teaching among young children is the teacher's lack of competence in interacting in English. This leads to the low proficiency of English among the students too. Thus, it is crucial to investigate the teachers' knowledge and performance in English language mastery.

Due to the weaknesses in the teachers' professional development in early childhood education, the teacher pays little or no attention to the use of English in their daily life. In comparison with English teachers in primary and secondary schools, a number of 61,000

English teachers have been retrained in the first batch (out of 3 batches) in Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015 – 2025. These teachers have been trained in TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) to teach English to primary and secondary school students. However, the preschool teachers are not given this opportunity as to prepare them to be competent in English communication. They found it difficult for them to communicate in English and to deliver the teaching in English thus this will affect the students' motivation too.

Moreover, there is lack of research in interaction strategies used by the preschool teachers to teach English. There are few studies conducted on the English mastery among children (Norlida et al., 2004; San & Christina, 2014) but there is no study being conducted on the teachers' perspective in English as an interaction medium in teaching and learning process. To date, there is no data pertaining the use of English as an interaction medium in the teaching and learning of early childhood education.

Purpose of the Study

This research is intended to investigate the effective interaction strategies used by the teachers in the teaching and learning English among preschool children. The researcher also looks into the role of teachers in applying effective interaction strategies.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this research is to investigate the effective interaction strategies used by the teachers in the teaching and learning English among preschool children.

Research Question

Based on the objectives of the study, these are the focused research questions designed to achieve the objectives of the research:

What are the strategies employed to use English as a tool for interaction and teaching and learning processes?

Significance of the Study

The contribution of this study is very important to the preschool children, teachers and the nation. The explanation is as such:

To the Preschool Children

The findings of this study will help the teachers to apply the effective interaction strategy in English such as daily routines and conversation and other group activities as well as to communicate with other children.

The findings also may serve as an opportunity for the preschool children to enjoy quality experience in learning English because the effective interaction strategy can boost the children's confidence in using English.

To the Preschool Teachers

Teachers can gain knowledge in effective way of interaction with children.

Teachers can improve their teaching strategies by using the effective interaction strategy in teaching English to preschool children.

This research serves as a guideline for the teachers to improve their confidence to speak English during the interaction with the children.

To the Nation

This research is in line with the first phase of National Education Blueprint (2013-2025) which emphasises on the importance of bilingual skills.

This research also supports the national policy of MBMMBI (2010) by providing a quality English learning in producing competitive human capital at a global level.

Limitation of the Study

This research is limited to the teachers' interaction during the teaching and learning in preschool classrooms. This research is not intended to assess the teacher's teaching quality but it is intended to identify the effective interaction strategies used by preschool teachers and the suitability of the strategies to be used in the classrooms.

This research adapted qualitative approach through purposive sampling. Five preschool teachers who had attended the short term course for English teaching in 2014 were selected. These teachers teach preschool classes under the Ministry of Education in Kerian district, Perak. Therefore, the findings of the study cannot be generalised and does not represent the whole population of preschool teachers in Malaysia. In addition, this research did not involve other private preschools or kindergartens.

Definitions

Preschool Children

'Preschool children' refers to four to six years old children who enrol in preschool education programme. These children are taught based on the National Preschool Curriculum Standard (2010). Maria Montessori (1965) viewed that children should be exposed to the formal education as early as four to six years old because they are highly sensitive at this point of time. A conducive learning environment is crucial to these preschool children before they go to Standard One.

Preschool Teaching

The process of teaching and learning in preschool classes is flexible in a comfortable, safe and fun. The learning takes four hours per day based on the components that proposed in the (National Preschool Curriculum Standard, 2010). The components are self-management, language competence, think creatively and imaginatively, and self-reflection at the end of the learning session (National Preschool Curriculum Standard, 2010).

National Preschool Curriculum Standard

National Preschool Curriculum Standard (2010) is a standardised reference document for preschool teachers and the owners of kindergarten under the Education Act 1996 (Preschool Education). This curriculum standard was designed in the effort of coordinating and improving the preschool education quality. It is intended to stimulate thinking by developing language and communication competence, thinking skills, positive attitude, good manners in developing preschool children's optimum potential.

Effective Interaction

The term 'Effective interaction' refers to the two-way communication between teachers and the students. In the teaching and learning process, teachers need to cultivate children's creative thinking through interaction such as suitable questioning technique, open-ended questions, encouraging the students to ask questions, praising and appreciating to encourage teachers and students' interaction (Norsita, 2014). Abdullah and Aion (2005) also agreed that questioning techniques from the teachers influence the students' thinking style and answering techniques.

Meanwhile, effective English language interaction refers to two-way communication between teachers and students by using English as a medium of communication. Teachers use both verbal and non-verbal interaction to deliver the subject matter. This is crucial because the students' experience in practicing effective interaction may contribute to the English language mastery.

Literature Review

Language and Communication Aspiration

The main principle in the teaching of language is to blend together the four skills of a language which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teaching listening is to make the students to differentiate between sound and comprehend what they listen. Speaking skill requires children to articulate sounds and words correctly and express their thoughts and feelings effectively and well mannered. Reading has its objective whereby children are able to pronounce written words and sentences and understand the meaning of the words read. Writing skills is intended to train the children to control their fine motor skills so that they can write words and form sentences. These skills can be obtained through meaningful and fun learning experiences.

The teaching and learning of English at this stage involves the children's experiences and their environment. Exposure to the use of simple sentences and materials surrounding can make it easy for them to learn English. English can be meaningful and effective through the interaction between teachers and children or among their peers. Their listening and speaking skills can be more meaningful if accompanied by body language, facial expression and eye contact (National Preschool Curriculum Standard, 2010).

Second Language Acquisition

Second language acquisition is a process of learning other languages besides one's mother tongue. It is a process of learning a new behaviour and creating new habits through trainings. It should be learned formally and will be developed through training and exercises.

In learning a second language, interaction is the central function and language teaching is mainly about communicative teaching ability. Language competence can be achieved when the children are able to understand messages and initiate interaction as a response in using the language.

There are several methods can be adopted by the teachers in implementing the effective teaching and learning activities. The natural method was proposed by Terell (1977) based on the language use in communicative situation similar to the traditional approach in language teaching. Terell (1977); Krashen (1978) discussing about how to acquire second language naturally. This method pays less attention to the grammatical analysis, drills, or theories.

According to Wahid (2004), second language development is more crucial before the age of three. The process will be done formally and requires a lot of exercises and drills until it

becomes a habit. Abdullah Hassan (1989) explained that the process of learning a second language happens to those who are five years and above whereby the second language acquisition does not happen naturally. Teachers need to plan English learning activities by using the effective methods.

According to Chomsky's cognitive approach (1957), learning a language is a process of mastering phonological structure, syntax and lexical of the language. Krashen (1981) said that an adult need to be motivated in enhancing speaking and interacting competence. If they fail to achieve the target, the second language learners should know the grammar and structure of the language. According to McLaughlin (1987) language is acquired through formal education in the classrooms. He explained that second language learning can be interrupted because this language is not related to their mother tongues.

There are four perspectives which are normally used in teaching and learning of a second language such as linguistic, cognitive, affective and interpersonal perspectives. All these aspects play important roles to determine one's second language learning. Another perspective, interaction functional perspective refers to the natural approach during interaction. This perspective consists of communicative aspects, suitable language structure and its usage during communication and children's involvement when socialising to master their second language.

Related Theories

Social interaction can be one of the mediums that plays important role in developing students' cognitive development including second language mastery. It is crucial to identify how and when the interaction can help the learning happens. Researches on social interaction in second language acquisition are basically based on the strategies to support or encourage children to acquire and master English. Several studies focused on the teachers' efforts in encouraging natural interaction between teachers and children (Brierley, 2003), among themselves (Hakamaki, 2005), and relationship among the teachers, peers and parents in achieving Zone of Proximal Development.

Social Interaction Theories

This theory is a two-way relationship between an individual with another individual, individual with group and group with other groups. Social interaction refers to the social relationship which happens to a specific function whether it is the interaction between individuals, individual with group and group with other groups. Social interaction also known as an action based on norm and social values of a society. This social process can be divided into several categories including cooperation, accommodation, assimilation and acculturation (Berry, 2010).

There several types of interaction in portraying social interaction such as competition, controversial and social conflict. According to Johnson (1998), social interaction causes individuals react in such ways until it creates relationship structure. According to Max Weber (1964), social interaction is a process of observation on behaviours of people in a group. He classified four types of social actions which influence system and social structure in a society such as:

- i) Instrumental rational – Social action done by an individual based of his own judgement. This involves the use of instrument to achieve the target.
- ii) Value oriented rational

- iii) Traditional action – someone who reacts of something according to what normally done by their ancestors.
- iv) Affective action – this is dominated by emotion without intellectual reflection and any conscious plan.

According to Charles Loomis (1957), social interaction process is influenced by several factors such as:

- i) Imitation – this factor may influence an individual to abide certain methods and values.
- ii) Suggestion – a process of individual accepting one's point of view or advice from other people.
- iii) Identification – an individual interest to be like other people.
- iv) Sympathy – is a condition whereby a person attracts to other parties and understands how exactly they feel.

Scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

This theory was initiated by Lev Vygotsky in 1934. Vygotsky (1978) is well known with *scaffolding* and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). *Scaffolding* and ZPD are the basic for this research. ZPD is the distance between the real development level with the individual potential development which is assisted by adult or through the collaboration among peers. It relates the differences between what can be learned with or without help from teachers and peers. A person who collaborates with his peers or adult is more capable in solving difficult and complex problems.

Scaffolding is a technique used by a person who is more skilful to help and guide those who are less knowledgeable (Suppiah et al., 2008). Teachers will guide the weak students by using scaffolding and soon they will be able to understand what is being taught by the teachers.

According to Vygotsky (1978), children are able to learn several concepts through experience. Their formal operational is further developed when they interact with others. In scaffolding, teachers provide assistance but the students need to work by themselves. The assistance and monitoring are given to the weakest students in learning and completing tasks successfully. In addition, teachers need to provide an environment that supports the students to carry out tasks successfully. Heartman (2002), teachers use scaffolding to assist the students to becoming independent learners who are able to solve problems on their own. It also motivates the students to excel in their studies. In addition, scaffolding also known as a teaching strategy can give positive impact on intellectual learning and development of a student.

Verenikina (2008) had conducted a research on eighty students by asking several open-ended questions discussing about several issues in making comparison between scaffolding and traditional methods. The findings showed that answers from students who received scaffolding are more active as compared to the other group. Students are more focused on the learning aims. By using scaffolding and other sophisticated materials in the classrooms, teachers are able to encourage their students to be more creative and confident.

Constructivism Theory

Constructivism is a learning process explaining about the knowledge customised in human's mind. The founders of constructivism are (Piaget, 1972; Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978; Dewey, 1928; Papert, 1963). This theory focuses more on the teaching and learning on children. According to constructivism, knowledge cannot be transferred from teachers to the children

in perfect manners. The interaction between teachers and children occurs actively and the teachers need to suit their teaching according to the students' understanding.

In addition, this theory emphasises on the dynamic and active learning. Teachers play important roles so that students can construct new knowledge based on their experiences from their interaction with teachers, peers and surrounding. This theory is suitable to be applied in today's education too.

Moreover, this theory was supported by The National Center of Quality Teaching and Learning (2013) through Head Start programme. This programme highlights the maximum classroom management, emotional support as well as effective teaching from adults especially teachers and parents. Teachers use language stimulation to the children in individual activities, small group and interaction with big groups.

Behaviourism Theory

Behaviourism theory was proposed by (Skinner, 1957; Thorndike, 1949; Pavlov, 1904). According to the behaviourists, learning is a fixed change which occurs in an individuals due to the training and experience. This learning process is experienced by all human since they were born. Behaviourism pays attention to the human's behaviour which can be observed and measured. Behaviour refers to the human's action as a response from internal or external stimulations.

This theory stresses more on the surrounding in the classrooms in assisting the process of teaching and learning. It includes teacher's act, peers and classroom environment. Teachers need to interact in a positive manner as to stimulate the students to respond especially during the language learning process. The learning process is carried out through drilling to ensure students' development. According to Skinner (1957), language learning occurs when the parents or teachers teach their children to speak and provide support and rewards for them when they managed to imitate or utter words that being taught by the adults.

Rewards are given to further establish a behaviour and correct language act done by the children. For instance, praise, applause and hugs may stimulate the children to interact by using correct language. Skinner (1957) claimed that humans are born with the natural ability to learn language. The ability to speak is a language act which is formed by itself according to behaviourism.

This theory is suitable to be applied on children who need for adult assistance especially teachers in the classrooms. Children aged between four to six years old need guidance and attention from the teachers because they are able to imitate and follow the instructions from the people in their surroundings. This theory also emphasises on the verbal skills which are listening and speaking as compared to reading and writing.

Cognitive Theory

Cognitive theory was introduced by (Gestalt, 1972). This theory focuses on the mental process which plays important role in acquiring language especially the mother tongue. Each individual has the ability to master language naturally. Children have the ability to listen and interpret sounds that they heard. This theory emphasise on the modelling through imitation.

Children acquire communicative competence when they listen to others. They repeat what they heard and soon they are able to be effective in interaction after they gain some experience from their surroundings. They explore the world actively and construct their own structure which is known as schema or cognitive structure. By having this schema, they are able to interpret their knowledge in the forms of symbolic, drawings, mental imagination, language and many more. In addition Piaget believed that cognitive development occurs gradually and he drew four cognitive development stages.

The first cognitive stage starts when a child was born. This development happens fast during childhood and getting slow when the child turns to a teenager then becoming adult. Therefore, preschool teachers should grab this opportunity by creating a comfortable and conducive environment in order to encourage children's involvement in teaching objectives. Gesell (1952) claimed that children need to be taught according to their level of maturity. Preschool teachers should guide and teach the students by using relevant approaches that suit with the children development. Drilling is crucial in order to make the children understand and learn well.

Past Studies

Verbal interaction strategy is very important in cultivating language competency especially English as second language among preschool children. This strategy may give great impact to the students' understanding and language mastery. Teachers need to make the teaching and learning process as fun as possible in order to stimulate children's active response. The techniques used in the teaching should be attractive and meaningful in order to improve children's interaction. Teresa (2010) had conducted a research on three classrooms on the language performance by using various techniques in the teaching of English through conversation between teachers and children. The methods used by the teachers including repetition of sentences, choral speaking, storytelling and poem recitation. The findings showed that multiple techniques supported children's understanding and encouraged interaction in English.

Sidek (2011) carried out a research on the children's manipulation interaction and the effect of scaffolding in English syntax development. This study involved a four year old student who has good command in English in learning syntax. This study suggested that scaffolding techniques is used as a potential medium to develop second language syntax.

Brierley (2003) in his research, has explored an action that can be done to improve interaction on a child in New Zealand. For the three weeks, Brierley asked Lisa to interact with other group of children. When Lisa has involved in group activities, Brierley used this opportunity by giving her support or using scaffolding techniques to investigate Lisa's second language acquisition. Lisa was taught with English words and started to be exposed in interaction. This study has shown Lisa's tendency to initiate interaction with the teacher and some improvement can be seen on her academic achievement.

Neu (2013) investigates oral interaction on four Spanish children at primary school in the United States. The researcher found children's response in answering questions, giving opinions and their reaction towards their English teacher in eight weeks. It was found that the interaction between teacher and children starts from the observation and non-verbal interaction or body language. Children started to respond when the teacher used both English and Spanish. They prefer to interact individually and in a small group as compared to a bigger group.

Apart from Brierley (2003); Sidek (2011); Neu (2013), there are some other researches showed that teachers may not realised the opportunity to interact with children in mastering English. Piker and Rex (2008) examined the influence of teacher's interaction on children in their surroundings. This involved four children aged three to four years old in conducting 'free play event'. The findings depicted that children would love to share their stories about their family but sometimes teachers are not interested. In other words, the children did not receive optimum support during the ZPD.

De Jong (2012) found that there are certain elements were not included in (Piker and Rex, 2008). The research did not include how the teachers use their own techniques to help and support children when they communicate with their friends. De Jong (2012) investigated the teaching strategy conducted among twenty teachers. The findings highlighted that teachers use four different strategies in using scaffolding in presenting the content, language learning approach, preparing facilities to the children to understand activities conducted and encouraging the children to develop their language.

According to Krashen (1985); Long (1983), the number of input is important in the learning of second language. Krashen (1985), stated that second language mastery occurs when children understand the language without any help and support from adults. Long (1983) has identified several strategies that can be used to improve children's understanding during interaction. Facella et al (2010) found that teachers have been using various effective strategies in their teaching and learning but they did not use the same strategies while interacting with the children.

Theoretically, all the findings support the interactive hypothesis (Long, 1996). When the students interact, they are actually making conventional and linguistics adjustment to enhance the learning of second language. Vygotsky (1978); Long (1996) emphasise on the importance of interaction. Swain hypothesis (1985, 2000, 2007) was closely related to the speaking and writing skills as part of the second language acquisition process.

Children who are highly motivated will show their interest and diligent in studying without relying much on the teachers. Therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to guide the children. When they are happy they will find it fun to learn English and can easily understand the subject matter and to master the language.

Based on the theories and past studies, the researcher paid a great attention to the teaching techniques used by the teachers in the classrooms. Teachers need to be sensitive to the children's needs and their readiness in learning English as second language. Preschool teachers should be confident to communicate in English because children at this stage should be nurtured to speak in English proficiently.

Methodology

Qualitative Design

The suitability of a research design derives from the nature of the social phenomena to be explored. A qualitative design has been chosen for this study. A research design explains a flexible set of guidelines that relate a theoretical paradigm first to strategies of enquiry and then to the choice of appropriate methods for collection of empirical materials (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Similarly, a research design connotes the plan for what is to be investigated and how this is to be undertaken (Edwards, 2010; Grieshaber, 2010). Qualitative researchers have a design which is based on theoretical assumptions, on traditions of data-collection, and on generally stated substantive questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In general, the main

purpose of qualitative study is to provide an in-depth description and understanding of human experience (Lichtman, 2010; Hughes, 2010).

Participants and Setting

Purposive sampling was used in this study as a sampling strategy. Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight from the participants and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned to illuminate the questions under study (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Creswell (2012) argued that the researcher must first determine what selection criteria are essential in choosing the sites or people to be studied in order to begin purposive sampling. Therefore, to find the best case to study, researchers would first need to establish the criteria that would guide case selection, and then select several cases that meet those criteria.

Selection Criteria

Selection criteria for the sites to be studied represented early childhood services and programmes which operated on similar programmes. The more demographically similar the participants are the better a researcher's ability to understand the 'general' nature of the experience to be defined (Creswell, 2007).

The early childhood teachers involved in this study had at least ten years of teaching experience and gone through a series of English proficiency courses organised by Ministry of Education. The proficiency courses were carried out once a week for five months from June to November 2014. This course particularly trained the government preschool teachers to improve their English proficiency and pedagogy in teaching English as well interaction skills.

Data Gathering Instruments

In order to increase the quality of case studies, Yin (2009) has suggested some principles for any data gathering effort in case studies which include the use of (1) multiple sources of evidence (evidence from two or more sources, converging on the same facts or findings), (2) a case study database (a formal assembly of evidence distinct from the final case study report), and (3) a chain of evidence (explicit links among the questions asked, the data collected, and the conclusions drawn). In our data gathering, the researchers included pre- and post- observation interviews with the teachers, interviews with the case study parents, and field notes based on my observations. In addition, the researchers created a case study database where we assembled evidence significant for the study, and linked the evidence to the research questions in the process of discussing findings and making conclusions of the study.

Two major methods of data gathering were used for each case study to obtain rich and detailed information about teaching English through effective interaction. One method was field notes encompassing direct observations of early childhood teachers' practices in each ECE centre alongside the reflective notes containing insights, understanding, questions and thoughts generated during the data gathering process. The second method was interviews conducted with each of the early childhood teachers. The last method was document analysis in which involved lesson plans.

Observation

Jones and Somekh (2008) claimed that the key factor in the choice of observation method is largely influenced by the methodological framework of the research. Unstructured observation, which allowed the researchers to sit at the back or side of the room or space and make detailed notes, was deemed appropriate for our study. Nevertheless, we needed to be thoughtful about the kind of relationship to be established with the participants as all kinds of observation involve “invading other people’s space and constructing meanings from the experience of participating in their activities” (Jones & Somekh, p. 141). Therefore, our aim during the field work was to increase the teachers’ level of comfort and build trust by making it clear that this study’s findings were not regarded as an attempt to find fault with their teaching practices.

The purpose of the observation in my study was to compile details of the participants’ experience. Naturalistic observation is useful, not only to identify the lived experiences of the individuals being studied, but also to understand the relevant contexts of the experiences (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2012). Liamputtong (2013) suggested that a camera can be used in an uncomplicated and unobtrusive manner to photograph participants in action. In qualitative study, unobtrusive methods are “non-reactive methods” (Liamputtong, 2013, p. 99) as they do not require the active participation of the participants (Bryman, 2004). In this study, the researchers took photographs and video-recorded the teachers and children as a visual record of how they looked in a natural setting in order for us to remember and to help manage my data. Although there was a possibility of being obtrusive when photographs or video recordings of participants were taken during observation, the researchers found that taking pictures and video footages was a means of enriching relations. After taking pictures and videos of events related to the teachers’ support for ELLs as they acquire English, we shared them with the teachers, which stimulated good conversation and produced rich data for the study.

In-depth Interviews

In this study, in-depth interview was the primary method of data gathering to get at the fundamental meaning of effective interaction. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) argued that interviewing is usually a better approach than participant observation in case studies as individuals’ perspectives will “emerge more clearly when you individually solicit their perspectives rather than observe their activities” (p. 56). Early in the interview, the researchers briefly informed the participants of the purpose, and made the assurance that what was said in the interview would be treated confidentially.

In this study, in-depth interview was the primary method of data gathering to get at the fundamental meaning of effective interaction strategies in supporting English acquisition among ELLs. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) argued that interviewing is usually a better approach than participant observation in case studies as individuals’ perspectives will “emerge more clearly when you individually solicit their perspectives rather than observe their activities” (p. 56). Early in the interview, I briefly informed the participants of my purpose, and made the assurance that what was said in the interview would be treated confidentially.

Post observation Interviews and Use of the Video Stimulated Recall Tool

In the post-observation interviews, participants reflected on the meanings behind statements made in the pre-observation interviews and interpreted practices as viewed on videotape, as a stimulated recall tool. The tool of stimulated recall is a family of introspective research procedures in which cognitive process can be examined by inviting participants' recollections when prompted by a video sequence (Hodgson, 2008; Lyle, 2003) or audio recordings (Dempsey, 2010). Stimulated recall is a tried and tested data collection that allows the interviewer to elicit, identify and explore participants' thinking (Henderson & Tallman, 2006). The stimulated recall tool in the field of education has been used by researchers to encourage and support teachers' reflective practice as well as to offer opportunities for pedagogical development in teacher-researcher collaborative research (Schmid, 2011).

In this study, video recordings as stimulated recall tools were used during the post observation interview with the teachers. Prior to the post-observation interview, videotapes were edited to approximately 40 minutes which contained recorded footage of key moments when the teachers were around or interacting with the ELLs. The participants used the videotaped observation of their centres as the stimulus for recalling specific examples of beliefs and practices and for explaining contexts that would be deemed as critical to the decisions they have made. Lyle (2003) suggested that the general pattern employed for the stimulated recall tool is a series of structured, but relatively open-ended, questions posed to the participant as soon as possible after, or during, the viewing of the tape. The post-observation interview of this study was semi-structured. When the video footage was shown to the teachers, they were asked to freely discuss whatever aspects of interaction strategies they felt were relevant for the study.

Inevitably, there are some limitations with the stimulated recall tool method such as its use becoming a matter of judgement; difficulty recalling the rationales of recorded actions; and the potential of bias in the responses (Lyle, 2003). Therefore, the researchers were careful when using the video stimulated recall tool and took precautionary steps before the post-observation interviews with the teachers.

Triangulation

Triangulation strengthens a study by using several kinds of methods or data (Lichtman, 2010; Patton, 2002). Bryman (2004) has suggested specific procedures such as the approaches of participant validation and triangulation. Participant validation means that researchers return to the research participants with their tentative results and refine them according to the feedback of the participants. To validate the findings, the researchers returned a summary account of what had been observed, and interview transcripts to the teacher participants to verify that accounts made reflect their beliefs and practices. Triangulation of data was also sought through the use of several data gathering methods to gain insights into the research questions. The use of interviews and observations as well as field notes allowed a degree of cross checking of the data gathered for this study. Additionally, insights used from theoretical perspectives to analyse the data, such as sociocultural and second language acquisition, also triangulated the data. The inclusion of multiple cases in this study is a common strategy for enhancing the external validity of findings. Merriam (2009) argued that the more cases included in a study, and the greater the variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be.

Analysis and Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents analysis and findings of the research. Analysis was carried out systematically in accordance to qualitative research design. Discussion of the findings will be discussed in the contexts emerged from the analysis which conveys aspects of teaching English through effective interaction.

Data Analysis

Holloway and Todres (2003) argued that qualitative research is very diverse, and complicated. Braun and Clarke (2006) claimed that thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis. It is the first qualitative method of analysis that researchers should learn, as it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, p. 79) and is commonly referred to as the constant comparative method in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009).

Thematic analysis provided the researchers with important skills that would be useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative as it offered flexibility yet provided a rich, detailed and complex account of data.

Steps in Data Analysis

Thematic analyses focuses on identifying and describing both explicit and implicit ideas and themes within the data (Guest et al., 2012). The basic step used in thematic analysis is coding, a process of closely inspecting text to look for recurrent themes, topics, relationships, and marking similar texts with a code or label to categorise them for later retrieval (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Guest et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009).

For individual case study analysis, three steps were involved which were in line with thematic analysis. The first step was to review the transcripts and field notes to get a sense of teaching English through effective interaction. The field notes were reread, the researchers listened to the audio recordings of interviews with teachers and watched the videotapes several times to gain sensitivity to the entire data. Early impressions were jotted down that the researchers thought would be significant for the analysis. The reflective notes were not analysed or included in the case description but they assisted me to analyse the data and reminded me of how and why the researchers understood something when it happened during the fieldwork.

The second step of the data analysis was to scrutinise the data to develop preliminary codes for clustering around topics. It involved extracting the notes and transcripts that directly pertained to understanding teaching English through effective interaction. Although certain codes were developed during the preliminary stage, coding topics was not a static process in data analysis as later thoughts about including other items were also part of the data development analysis.

The final stage of the data analysis was to discover the themes. This was achieved through close examination of the data and studying the preliminary codes many times to see whether

some of them illustrated a similar point. From the initial codes, the researchers identified keywords, phrases and sentences that indicated similarities in the early childhood teachers' beliefs and practices in supporting English acquisition among ELLs and grouped these together. As the researchers read and listened, patterns and meanings were searched among all the initial codes. The researchers looked across the transcripts and notes to reorganise the segmented codes to establish links with my research questions. Then the researchers defined and named the main themes, and identified sub-themes within the main themes. The names of the themes were selected so the readers would easily understand what it meant in the context of the findings of the study.

In this section, the researchers have focused on the research practice as they had been designed and carried out the study in response to the research focus, the research questions, and the theoretical orientations. The researchers have described the procedures and documentations required in gaining ethical approval. In carrying out the study, the researchers have discussed aspects pertaining to participants, phases of the study, field work strategies, data gathering, and data analysis.

Results: Themes

Following the analysis steps described, these themes emerged from the data collected for this study. These themes convey aspects of effective interaction strategies as observed while the teachers teach the preschool children and as analysed from the interviews with the teachers.

Opportunities during Teaching and Learning

The first theme that emerged from the data is opportunities during teaching and learning process. The opportunities given by the teachers are closely related to the effective interaction strategies between the teachers and children. Opportunities given are in two main ways; first, children are given opportunity to interact at an individual basis and second, interaction within group.

Individual Opportunities to Share Ideas or Opinions

It has been observed during two lessons carried out by two teachers, Ms Ani and Ms Noni, teaching on the topics "Roles of a mother" and "Classroom furniture and equipment" respectively. Both teachers employed child centred approaches in which encourages children to be active in their learning. Ms Noni provided many opportunities to the children to answer questions, although there were simple questions, and interacted individually with the children. She also gave opportunities to the children to give their ideas and opinions. In assisting the children to express their opinions, she used "circle map" and this has been encouraging the children to interact with her. The children were very active in expressing their ideas as evident in the observation:

Teacher	:	We use circle map to state the role of mother. Role of mother. <i>Maksudnya peranan ibu kepada kita</i> . What mothers do at home, for us, now, what is the role of our mother, Ayu?
Child 1	:	Cook
Teacher	:	Yes. Cook. Next?
Child 2	:	Mother cook food
Teacher	:	Yes, mother cook food. Second? Who knows?

Child 3 : Mother buy books.
 Teacher : Yes, good. Next?
 Child 4 : Give birth.
 Teacher : Yes, give birth. Next?
 Child 4 : Love
 Teacher : Yes Caring. *Maksudnya emak menjaga kita.*

Although the children answered briefly, but it was evident that they could interact and the children understood what was required of them. The children's worksheet based on the topic discussed showed that the children were able to comprehend the input from the interaction.

It has been observed that Ms Ani's lesson encouraged children to interact during English lesson. The classroom atmosphere was noticed to be cheerful as the children participated actively. Similar to Ms Noni's class, where the children's responses were brief due to their limited proficiency, the children seemed to be active in their learning as they interacted with the teacher as shown below:

Teacher : Next, what is this?
 Children : Eraser? Chalk? Duster?
 Teacher : Yes Uza. Duster. This is a duster. Very good. Here, take your star (acknowledgement)
 Child 1 : This is a duster.
 Teacher : Good. Here is your star. (acknowledgement) What is this?
 Child 2 : Bag. Good.
 Teacher : Bag or book?
 Child 3 : Bag.
 Teacher : Good. And then, what is this, (name of the child)?
 Child 4 : Book
 Teacher : Good. Yes, this is a book. Ok. Look at this. What is this?
 Child 5 : Chair
 Teacher : Yes. Chair.
 Child 6 : Chair.

These two excerpt of examples align with Brierley's (2013) study in which highlight that teachers should give opportunities to young children to interact. Brierley (2013) suggested that individual responses from children would encourage children to interact with their teachers.

Class Opportunities to Share Ideas or Opinions

It has been observed that children incline to respond to the teachers during teaching and learning process. The group response gives the opportunity for the shy and less confident children to start interacting in English. It is, then particularly, effective for these children as they could still use English to interact during the lessons without having the attention given to them if they speak individually:

Teacher : What is this?
 Children : Chicken. Fried chicken (class)

Teacher : Yes, good. Fried chicken
Children : Fried chicken (class)
Teacher : Look at this? What is this?
Children : Fish (fish)
Teacher : Yes, teacher heard that. Fried fish. Shanim, do you like fish?
Children : Yes
Teacher : All of you say, Fried fish. I like to eat fried fish
Children : I like to eat fried fish (class)

Ms Zie was observed to give the opportunities to the children to answer as a class. She resorted to give whole class responses when she noticed that the class was not responsive when she asked an individual child to respond during the lesson. During the interview, she highlighted that interaction with the whole class was a deliberate strategy to give confidence to use English, and later on prepared the children to interact in English.

The findings indicate that opportunities to either use English individually or as a whole class may serve as a basis for teaching English through effective interaction. Abdul Rashid et al (2013) claimed that interaction is essential for teaching and learning particularly English. Teachers' questions based on topics that the children are familiar with may attract children to respond and to interact with the teachers and friends.

Teachers' Pedagogy

Appropriate pedagogy employed by the teachers in the study highlights that it encourages interaction between the teachers and children. It has been observed that the teachers have been using varieties of pedagogy in ensuring the lessons achieve the objectives. Some teachers use strategies such as repetition, translation and parallel talk to encourage the children to interact in English.

Repetition

During the interview sessions, most participants claimed that they use repetition techniques because most of the children are not proficient in the language. As some of the teachers stated that the main reason for repetition technique is to reinforce the children's understanding on the use of English.

It has been observed that Ms Su' lesson emphasised repetition of words that she was going to use prior to her lessons. When asked the reason behind her practice, she claimed that it was important for the children to get used to those words that she was going to use. Some of the words that she asked the children to repeat was the main words that she was going to use such as house, roof, door, window, gate and fence in her lessons. Having understood those important words, she claimed, would assist children to interact effectively with the teacher during the teaching and learning process.

Teacher : What is this?
Children : Roof.
Teacher : Yes, this is a roof. Again
Children : This is a roof
Teacher : What is this?

Children : Window
 Teacher : Yes, this is a window. Again
 Children : This is a window
 Teacher : What is this?
 Children : Door
 Teacher : Good. This is a door. Again
 Children : This is a door

As shown in the above excerpt, Ms Su initially repeated the word and then introduced how the word was being used as a phrase. She claimed that the use of simple phrases encourage effective interaction and enhance their understanding about the meaning of the word. In another situation, Ms Su has been observed to use the repetition technique in a different context. When Ms Su saw that one child was observed to open the window, she repeated the word window and asked the child what was he doing.

Repetition technique has been used by participants such as Ms Lina. In her lesson entitled "My emotion", she repeated core words for the lesson many times. She asked the children to repeat after her, while simultaneously expressed the meaning of the word in non-verbal manner. It has been observed that the children repeated words such as "happy", "sad" and "angry". Similarly to Ms Su's response, Ms Lina argued that repetition techniques helped the children to understand the meaning of the word, practised the pronunciation of the words and later on she felt that the children would be able to use the words in their interactions.

Teacher : Show me your happy face.
 Children : Smile. (Children smiled)
 Teacher : Say after teacher 'I'm smiling'
 Children : I'm smiling
 Teacher : Faiz, Can you show me your happy face? And say 'I'm smiling'
 Children : I'm smiling (Children smiled)
 Teacher : Khaleesya, show me your happy face.
 Children : I'm smiling (Children smiled)
 Teacher : Dania, show me your happy face.
 Children : I'm smiling (Children smiled)

In other lesson taught by Ms Su, it has been observed that Ms Su approached a child and asked him, "Nazmi, do you still remember? Show me your happy face". The child responded to Ms Su's by smiling "I'm smiling". The incident indicates that the child was able to use the phrase "I'm smiling" in his interaction with Ms Su as he and the rest of the class have repeated the words, together with the facial expression and understood how the use of word may be used in his interaction with Ms Su.

Pedagogy-wise, teachers must be able to use appropriate techniques in which support effective interaction between teachers and children as well as children and their friends. In this theme, repetition and non-verbal (facial expression) language assist the children in their interaction during the teaching and learning process.

Translation

English is a second language to the children in this study. Therefore, most children observed are more comfortable to interact in their mother tongue that was Malay language. Nevertheless, as stated in the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (2010) that English must be used in half of the lessons in a week.

The researchers found that translation is an important theme as most of the teacher participants used the translation techniques in most of their lessons as well as during the lessons. When asked the rationale of using translation in their interaction during the interviews, most teachers claimed that the children understand better when the teachers translated some important words in their interaction.

Ms Su highlighted that whenever she translated important words and phrases, she could see that the children could understand and their understanding encourage them to interact in English. During an observation in Ms Su's lesson, it was evident that she translated her phrases to assist the children's understanding:

Teacher	:	Look at this. What is this?
Children	:	<i>Rumah.</i>
Teacher	:	In English. Who knows?
Teacher	:	All of you say 'house'
Children	:	House.
Teacher	:	Damia, What colour is your house? <i>Rumah kamu warna apa?</i>
Children	:	Purple.
Teacher	:	My house is purple. <i>Rumah saya warna ungu.</i>
Children	:	My house is purple
Teacher	:	Adi, what colour is your house?

In summary, translation assisted the children's understanding and with that understanding, it could encourage the children to use English as they interacted with their teachers and friends. In reality, young children whom have not been exposed to the use of English might feel difficult to understand English words if the teachers had not translated the English words to the mother tongue.

Motivation

Motivation is the final theme of the study based on the observation, interview and document analysis. It has been observed and highlighted in the interview that the teachers motivated the children to use English in their interaction. The teachers used many techniques to motivate the children to interact in English.

Extrinsic motivation

Extrinsic motivation refers to the external factors that drive the children to attempt certain behaviours. Among the external factors are praises and encouragement in which motivate a person to do better each time he or she is presented with an opportunity.

In an interview with Ms Noni, she claimed that whenever she praised the children during the teaching and learning process, she would always get good responses from them. It has been observed in Ms Noni's lesson when she asked a child to act out a situation where "a mother is cooking". When the child acted out as instructed, she praised the child. Another child volunteered to act out "a situation where a sister is reading". Ms Noni promptly praised the child. Subsequently, many other children volunteered to do the activity. This scenario highlights that most of the children were motivated to do the activity, in which encourages them to understand and use English in their interaction.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation refers to the internal factors that encourage children to do something and they do not rely on external factors. It could be seen that children who are intrinsically motivated do better than those who are not.

During Ms Ani's class, children have been observed to be intrinsically motivated as there were many teaching aids available. The children were excited to participate in the lessons as they would like to use the teaching aids prepared by the Ms Ani. The children used the teaching aids and as they participated actively, they were observed to use English in their interaction during the lesson. The topic chosen by Ms Ani, which is "Mother" was also another factor why the children were intrinsically motivated to interact during the lesson. Although they might have an adequate vocabulary to express themselves, they were willing to attempt to interact as the topic was of their interest and they have many ideas to share with their teacher and friends.

Discussion

Teaching English through Effective Interaction Strategies

The themes emerged from the analysis suggested that there are three main strategies that have been highlighted to encourage interaction as a tool for the children to learn English. Opportunities, teachers' pedagogy and motivation were identified to contribute largely to how to teach English through effective English in early childhood education, specifically in preschool education.

In Malaysian preschool context, these findings reflect of what could be happening in natural settings during the social interactions between teachers and the ELLs. English should be used not only as a subject in early childhood classrooms but also during teacher-child interactions as they engage in indoor as well as outdoor activities. In most cases, their teaching often emphasized mechanical conversation practices, instead of using English in real-life interactions within early childhood settings. In PERMATA curriculum (an early childhood curriculum which focuses on the teaching and learning of children aged 0-4 years old), the process of stimulating a child's mind is systematically conducted through 3 core methods, namely exploration, experimentation and experience through play (Kursus Asuhan dan Didikan Awal Kanak-Kanak PERMATA Negara, 2013). National Standard of Preschool Curriculum, focuses on the child-centred teaching and learning process, which emphasises on discovery inquiry, uses the integrated teaching and learning as well as the learning through play approaches, promotes contextual as well as project-based learning (KPM, 2010). Both curriculums highlight the importance of teachers' interaction with children in their teaching and learning approaches.

Implications of the Study

One implication of this study is that exposure to an English dominant context is important to develop the ELLs' interactions. In addition, it is also important to understand how the teachers structure their instruction to identify what strategies work best in which situation or for what kind of tasks as the teachers scaffold the ELLs' English acquisition within their ZPD.

The findings add to the existing body of literature on teaching English through effective interaction. In a Malaysian context, the study provides a platform from which to consider how early childhood teachers in Malaysia could support English acquisition among young learners through effective interaction strategies. Although the study set out to focus on the teachers, it is believed that it was important to get a deeper understanding about the parents' perspectives regarding their children's English acquisition at preschool level. Understanding both parents' and the teachers' perspectives, based on mutual communication, is essential for positive parent and teacher relationships to enhance children's English acquisition.

In terms of methods, video-stimulated recall interviews served as a valuable means of encouraging and supporting teachers' reflective practice, as well as offering opportunities for pedagogical development in teacher-researcher collaborative research (Schmid, 2011).

Conclusion

This study has broadened horizons as ECE academics who has been teaching ECE pre service teachers. While this study is not conclusive in exploring the teaching of English through effective interaction and the findings are not generalisable to other educational settings, it does offer helpful insights for teachers who work with children who are linguistically and culturally diverse in the complex terrain of contemporary early childhood education.

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Corresponding Author

Maznah Ahmad, Department of Early Education, Faculty of Education & Human Development, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjung Malim, Malaysia, Email: maznah35@gmail.com.

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