

Exploring Teachers' Techniques for Introducing English Vocabulary to Young Learners

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Abstract

Article History:

Received: 29/06/2025

Accepted: 16/12/2025

Published: 10/01/2026

Keywords:

*Young learner,
teaching vocabulary,
teaching techniques*

English is the global communication language. It makes English is one of the subjects taught to students from an early age. The introduction of English vocabulary is one of the important materials taught to young learners. At a young age level, learners naturally have the ability to grasp new information quickly but they are still emotionally unstable. They have different characteristics and learning preferences from adults. That's why teachers must create a suitable learning atmosphere through good and creative teaching techniques so that students are encouraged to be active in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, this article aims to explain some English vocabulary teaching techniques that can be applied by teachers for young learners. The method used is descriptive qualitative research. The researcher interviewed 4 teachers, observed teaching and learning activities in the classroom and conducted a documentation study to collect data. The results showed that there are several techniques used to teach vocabulary to young learners. These techniques are singing, using pictures and drawing, listening and repeating, using real objects, using videos and question and answer.

Kata Kunci:

*Pelajar usia dini,
mengajar kosakata,
teknik-teknik
mengajar*

Abstrak

Bahasa Inggris adalah bahasa komunikasi global. Hal ini membuat bahasa Inggris menjadi salah satu mata pelajaran yang diajarkan kepada para pelajar sejak usia dini. Pengenalan akan kosakata bahasa Inggris menjadi salah satu materi penting yang diajarkan pada pelajar usia muda. Pada level usia yang masih muda, para pelajar secara alami memiliki kemampuan menangkap informasi baru dengan cepat namun mereka masih labil secara emosional. Mereka memiliki karakteristik dan preferensi pembelajaran yang berbeda dengan orang dewasa. Hal inilah yang membuat para guru mesti menciptakan suasana belajar yang sesuai melalui teknik mengajar yang baik dan kreatif sehingga para pelajar terdorong untuk aktif dalam proses belajar mengajar. Oleh karena itu, artikel ini bertujuan untuk

menjelaskan beberapa teknik mengajar kosakata bahasa Inggris yang dapat diterapkan oleh para guru bagi pelajar usia dini. Metode yang digunakan adalah penelitian deskriptif kualitatif. Peneliti mewawancarai 4 orang guru, mengobservasi kegiatan belajar mengajar di kelas dan melakukan study dokumentasi untuk mengumpulkan data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan ada beberapa teknik yang dipakai untuk mengajar kosakata kepada para pelajar usia dini. Teknik tersebut adalah bernyanyi, menggunakan gambar dan menggambar, mendengarkan dan mengulangi, menggunakan benda nyata, menggunakan video dan tanya jawab.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a media of communication between humans. Language is one of basic need for human life, because it plays a role as a medium in providing ideas, notions and ways of human thinking. Nowadays, English is an important language to master. English is used by various nations to communicate with nations around the world (Fathul Zannah and Desi Hidayanti, 2024). In the aspects of human life such as education, economics, politics, and so on, English takes an important role. The influence of rapid globalization has turned the world into a global village, where in communication across countries and cultures, English is the most commonly used language (Suwartono, 2024). As an international language used in global communication, English is a language that must be taught to students in Indonesia. In Indonesian education curriculum, English is one of the most important subjects. In addition, effective interaction in language learning also plays an important role in developing students' language skills. English learning is important to be implemented in elementary school because this level is the initial level for students to start learning English, and good interaction in English learning at this level is very important to form a strong foundation in students' language skills (Mustoip et al., 2024). Therefore, in Indonesia's curriculum, English is one of subject that can be taught from elementary up to university level.

In the process of teaching and learning English, there are basic skills that must be mastered such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills are very beneficial in improving students' ability to communicate effectively in English.

Listening and speaking are skills that have a connection in real life. The integration of these two skills can foster effective oral communication. Real and purposeful communication becomes successful when this integration occurs. Meanwhile, reading and writing have a strong relationship and are tools to achieve effective written communication (Sadiku, 2015). In addition, there are also other language components that are used to support the development of English language skills. These components are pronunciation, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary (Pradini & Adnyayanti, 2022). Therefore, these are the aspects that must be considered in learning English.

In learning English, vocabulary is an important element that needs to be mastered. This is very influential in learning English, and is the key for someone to be fluent in English especially to interact with society. Vocabulary will be the main key in learning English, because students will articulate their ideas by using extensive vocabulary skills (Wibowo et al., n.d., 2024). Due to the importance of this element, vocabulary is often taught to young learners in elementary level. Vocabulary is seen as the most ideal component to be taught to the young learners in English language learning. Students at the primary level can easily understand language lessons because they are very interested in new things. They also have a natural absorption of other cultures through language (Wulandari et al., 2020). It can develop their ability to master in English vocabulary.

Additionally, vocabulary is an important element that must be taught from an early age. At this time, they are in the “golden age” where they can quickly accept new things or information. They also have a very critical brain intelligence so that it is easy to realize and learn new situations or conditions around them, including the existence of language (Sukarno in Pradini & Adnyayanti, 2022). Therefore, at this age the children are taught vocabulary because they tend to absorb new language more quickly. This is because they are in an active stage of cognitive development and have high curiosity. Thus, it is assumed that vocabulary learning that starts early will be more easily absorbed and captured by children. This is why learning English vocabulary starting from young learner level is now important.

However, teaching English at young learner level is not easy. The unstable condition of children makes teachers have to use learning techniques that are interesting, interactive and according to the characteristics of children. A study conducted by Schmitt, (2015) shows that games are one of the alternatives that can be applied to teach children at an early age. This is because games can involve all students in teaching and learning activities appropriately. In another study, Susanto, (2017) presented various techniques in teaching vocabulary to young children. The teachers applied several techniques to teach vocabulary. There are teach vocabulary using enumeration and contrast, using drawing and picture, using objects, drilling, spelling and so on. Another study conducted by Lelawati et al., (2018) at SD Negeri Padasuka 2 Soreang. They showed that the teachers applied various techniques in teaching vocabulary. The techniques consisted of two stages. First, to present new words and second, to make students practice the words they have learned. In the first stage, the teachers used flashcards and imitation techniques while in the second stage, the teachers used identification and matching tasks more often.

Based on previous studies, it shows that teaching techniques are very important for students' vocabulary learning. However, these studies feature techniques that teachers apply to learners who are slightly older in terms of age. Perhaps the results would have been different if the study had been conducted on English teachers who teach English to younger learners. These studies also still present the various techniques in general, not looking at the age progression of the students. The gaps in these studies and the current phenomenon of teaching English to younger children, made the researchers interested to examining the techniques that teachers use to teach vocabulary to young learners to facilitate their language learning. Therefore, this current study aims to identify the techniques employed by teachers at Sint Paul Kindergarten, Maumere in teaching vocabulary to young learners aged 3-6 years old.

METHOD

This research used a descriptive qualitative research design. Qualitative research is research that uses designs that emerge and shape as researchers make

ongoing decisions that reflect what they have learned. The emergent design is a reflection of their desire to conduct investigations based on the realities and perspectives of participants-realities and perspectives that are not known at the beginning (Lincoln & Guba in Polit & Beck, 2012). Qualitative description is a type of research where uses methods of collecting, describing, classifying, and analysing data, and then drawing conclusions (Josafat Gultom et al., 2021). In this study, the researchers used interview, observation and documentation techniques to collect data from individuals, object and school institutions. Specifically, this study focused on four teachers as informants. They are teachers at Sint Paul Kindergarten, Maumere who teach at different grade levels according to the age of the students. This difference reflects a maximum variation sampling strategy, in which researchers attempt to capture a variety of perspective on a topic. By interviewing teachers from different grade levels, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

The research procedure started with interviewing the teachers who teach at Sint Paul Kindergarten. The interviews focused on the teachers' experiences and techniques in teaching English vocabulary to young learners in different grades. In order to obtain accurate data, the researcher made audio recordings and notes during the interviews. After the interview stage, the researcher conducted classroom observations and video documentation to obtain accurate data on the teachers' implementation of English teaching techniques. Furthermore, the researcher studied some documents in this school which are used as learning resources for teachers and students.

The data obtained then analysed using various techniques such as collection, reduction, display and conclusion. Interview transcripts, observation notes and findings on learning resource documents were used to ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the interviews with the four informants, the researchers found that the teaching and learning process at Sint Paul Kindergarten is divided into three

different class levels according to the age of the students. The class levels are Nursery class (3-4 years old), Kinder 1 (4-5 years old) and Kinder 2 (5-6 years old). In this level, teachers teach a variety of learning materials, including English. In general, English learning at Sint Paul Kindergarten emphasizes on vocabulary recognition. In addition, since the teachers are religious nuns, they also train the children to pray in English. The teachers argued that basically, teaching vocabulary to children is done by considering the age of the children as well as their characteristics. So, in these three grade levels, they apply different vocabulary teaching techniques. However, all four teachers agree that teaching vocabulary to early learners requires an interesting learning technique that allows them to enjoy the learning process.

Teaching Vocabulary in Nursery Class (3-4 years)

Based on the interview with Sr. Maria Sincelina No'u, ASP, the researchers found that in this level, the learning for children is focused on listening and recognizing. Children are not really required to mention or repeat vocabulary in English personally. Therefore, at this level, the technique used to teach English vocabulary is through singing. By this strategy, the teacher trains and familiarizes the children to listen English words. Sr. Maria, ASP said “at this level children are introduced to English vocabulary related to letters, numbers, names of days, months and other simple basic words. We arrange the vocabulary in song notation and sing it then they follow along together”. Based on the researchers’ observation, the teacher in this class also uses listen and repeat technique. The teacher asks the children to repeat together the words that she mentions. This is done by the teacher slowly and repeatedly so that students become familiar with the vocabulary and can follow it well. This technique is used to introduce new vocabulary to children. After they are familiar with the words, the singing technique as described above is used.

Teaching Vocabulary in Kinder 1 (4-5 years)

At this level, English teaching uses a specific theme. For example, themes about parts of body, colours, animals and so on. To introduce vocabulary in the themes taught by the teacher, there are several techniques made. Sr. Katarina Herin,

ASP said “I use various techniques in teaching English vocabulary to children depending on the situation and the theme. Based on my experience, children generally prefer to learn by singing. Thus, I teach them English words using songs. I mostly play songs that match to the theme of the lesson using audio and invite them to sing along”. Another technique used by teacher in introducing English vocabulary in this class is by using pictures. To facilitate teaching, the teacher prints various pictures according to the theme of the lesson and posts them in the classroom. These pictures are attractively and colourfully packaged to attract children’s interest in the object being taught.

In addition, vocabulary teaching is also made using real objects. Sr. Katarina, ASP said “*at this age, teaching English vocabulary will be more effective if we use objects that are around us. For example, when I want to introduce the vocabulary ‘yellow’, I immediately point to the yellow table in the classroom. When I want to teach the word ‘kursi’ in English, I immediately pick up a chair and call the object that I have held with the word ‘chair’. It makes them catch and remember the word faster*”. The introduction of English vocabulary is also done when they do exercise in the morning before starting the class. They do activities to train gross motor skills, such as exercise or dancing using audio in English. This trains the children’s subconscious to absorb English vocabulary that they hear from the audio. In this class, the listen and repeat technique is also used. However, there is a slight difference with the previous class, in this class this technique is often followed by movement, such as the word “sit” or “stand” is immediately followed by the movement of sitting or standing.

The teacher assesses whether the students catch the vocabulary that they are teaching by using the question-and-answer technique. This technique is usually done by the teacher at the beginning of the learning process to test children’s understanding of the previous meeting’s material or at the end of the lesson to test the children’s ability to capture the material explained that day. This is also done to keep the classroom atmosphere lively and the children more active. In addition, the teacher’s questions motivate the students to find the answers.

Teaching Vocabulary in Kinder 2 (5-6 years)

As in the previous level, English vocabulary learning at this level also uses themes. However, there is a slight difference in the themes. At this level, the lesson themes have a slightly higher level. Sr. Imelda Florentina Kalamidi Ole, ASP said *“children at this level have acquired the basic knowledge of English vocabulary from the previous level so at this level I introduce new vocabulary related to the new themes that I take from the package book. For example, when learning about the theme of recreation, I will mention what things we can see at the beach, what items are brought to the beach and what things are made at the beach. From this theme they can learn new words such as ‘beach’, ‘sand’, ‘sea’, ‘swimming’, ‘boat’, ‘fishing’ and others. Then, after I introduce the new words, I create activities such as drawing and colouring. Sometimes I use the ‘English Smart’ student handbook because it also contains worksheets for children”*.

In addition to the drawing technique, teachers are also seen using other techniques in introducing vocabulary, such as using posters. Sr. Imelda, ASP explained *“I often use posters when I introduce a new theme to the children. After introducing the words, I put the posters on the classroom wall. So that the children can see it all the time when they are playing, eating, and other activities in the classroom. This allows them to remember what they have learned”*. Furthermore, Sr. Emerensiana Beto Mukin, ASP who also teaches children at this level said *“the teaching technique of using songs as in the previous classes is also still made in this class. I play audio songs in English and sing along with them. The song chosen is of course related to the theme being taught. To introduce English vocabulary, I also use videos. I invite them to watch a short video for example about space objects. After watching I play back the video without audio and ask them to name the English word from the picture that appears on the screen. From this they can learn new vocabulary such as ‘stars’, ‘moon’, ‘sky’, ‘sun’, ‘planets’ and so on. I feel this strategy is effective at their age because children like to watch”*.

Based on observations, children at this level are introduced to increasingly complex vocabulary. If in the previous grade level, children are introduced to real nouns that are around them, then at this level children also learn verbs, such as

“swimming”, “sweeping”, “watching” and so on. At this level, children are also introduced to the plural form of a word. In contrast to the Nursery class, in this class the children are given individual opportunities to pronounce or repeat the vocabulary taught by the teacher. Thus, the teacher can correct the pronunciation. This is done repeatedly until the children can pronounce the word properly.

Discussion about the Techniques

Based on the findings in this study, there are several techniques used by teachers at Sint Paul Kindergarten in introducing English vocabulary to young learners.

1. Singing

Singing techniques are applied by teachers in every grade level at Sint Paul Kindergarten. Almost every meeting this technique is used to make the students enjoy learning English. Using this technique is a good way because children have a short attention span. Teaching with singing techniques is a learning approach that can actually make children happy and joyful. They are directed to a psychological condition to build a happy soul, happy to enjoy beauty, develop feelings through singing, namely the expression of words and tones that are assembled into a song, as well as rhythms that beautify the learning atmosphere. Singing is one of the most popular activities for children. Almost every child really enjoys listening to songs or chants, especially if the songs are performed by children of the same age and followed by simple body movements (Mindradini in Danang, 2022). Songs and music contain various elements that are tools to develop children's cognitive abilities. High tones provide an opportunity for children to train their auditory sensitivity. Changes in the rhythm of the music train children to distinguish inner rhythms and motor skills when combined with movement exercises according to the lyrics (Miranti et al., 2015). This confirms that singing is a technique that can stimulate children's attention to the English vocabulary taught to them.

Sr. Imelda, ASP said *I think this technique is the most effective and easy to apply to children of their age. They are very excited and I see that the children can catch and remember the words in the song even though they may not know the*

meaning. I usually choose songs that the sentences are not too long and are easy for children to memorize. Sometimes I also choose a tune that the children already know but I change the lyrics with English words. This technique is carried out in two ways, through songs created and sung by the teacher or songs played using audio. One of the skills that teachers must have to use this technique is to have a good voice and be able to present the notes of the song well to attract children's interest. Based on observations, it can also be concluded that this technique is predominantly used in classroom activities ranging from Nursery to Kinder 2 classes.

2. Using Pictures and drawing

This technique is used as a way to clarify the meaning of unknown words. Pictures, whether printed or digital, are highly usable materials in teaching English to young learners. There are several benefits of using images for young learners as they can help them visually understand the reference of words without the presence of the actual reference (Sehan, 2018). The use of this technique is very helpful for children in recognizing vocabulary from objects that are not around them.

In the Kinder 1 class, Sr. Katarina, ASP uses pictures from various sources that she finds and then the pictures are printed and displayed in front of the class. Sr. Emerensiana, ASP uses poster media in Kinder 2 class as an initial activity to introduce new vocabulary to the children. The pictures are hung in the classroom to be used as often as possible in learning. In addition, based on observation, this technique can be done by the teacher herself drawing on the white board as well as the children being asked to draw or colour on their worksheets. This technique provides visual support that helps students recognize and remember vocabulary.

3. Listen and Repeat

Listen and repeat techniques is used by teachers to introduce vocabulary to young learners. This technique can be made by asking students to repeat the words mentioned by the teacher. The words are spoken slowly and repeatedly, so that students can follow well. This is done continuously and makes students familiar with the new words. In other words, this technique can also be classified to the Total Physical Response (TPR) technique. In this technique, students first listen to a new

word or phrase, then imitate it with speech and physical movements. Repetition and body movements help students understand and remember new vocabulary. Teaching using the TPR method should integrate language with action and at the same time first develop listening skills and then speaking. TPR method is suitable for children. Children need to move because they have a lot of energy and are prone to short attention spans (Pertiwi et al., 2021).

Sr. Katarina, ASP explained *this technique requires a teacher to have a clear and firm voice so that the words spoken are clear and can be captured by the children. If the teacher's voice is too small then this technique cannot be carried out properly.* Teachers become good models for students. This means that the teacher must have the ability to speak English, especially in pronunciation because children hear and imitate what the teacher says (Lelawati et al., 2018). Sr. Katarina, ASP continued *the challenge I face when teaching using this technique is how the children repeat the words I say. Because they are still children, the words that they spoke are not clear. Sometimes they are more interested in the movements so they don't want to say the words clearly. This requires patience and constant repetition until they can pronounce the word clearly.* Based on observations, this technique is mostly done in the Nursery and Kinder 1 grade levels. In classroom activities, this technique works by the teacher saying a word or phrase, and the children listen carefully. Then the teacher gives the movement instruction that corresponds to the word, and the students imitate the movement while saying the same word. This is done repeatedly and to keep the students' interest, variations of words and movements are made that are fun for the children.

4. Using Real Thing

This technique was created to show meaning when vocabulary consists of concrete nouns. Introducing a new word by showing the original object often helps students to memorize the word through visualization. Objects in the classroom or brought into the classroom can be used as objects to teach vocabulary to children. In education, the real objects used are referred as realia media. Realia are real objects that are used as real media for learning in the classroom. Even simple real objects can be used not only for vocabulary recognition but also for situation development

(Puspaardini et al., 2019). In addition, realia are objects and props that are thought of as real things, used to assist in practicing new language, as a way to present examples from the real world. Therefore, realia are often used in the teaching and learning process and as aids to introduce new subjects (Widya et al., 2018).

This shows that the use of real objects really helps children remember new words. The advantage of this technique is that by using real objects or realia is that children are given a richer sensory experience compared to written words or pictures. This can enhance their experience and retention of the vocabulary being taught. Children can hold, smell and try the object so that their learning experience feels more real and interesting. Realia helps to make English language input as comprehensible as possible and to build “an associative bridge” between the classroom and the world (Bryan in Widya et al., 2018). This is in line with what Sr. Katarina, ASP, said, children can directly see and touch the objects that I mention in English so that they remember more easily. If in the next meeting we test their memory of a word, then this real object can be a quick trigger for them to restore their memory.

5. Using Video

This technique is often used with the aim of making vocabulary learning more varied. However, there are certainly effects of using this technique on vocabulary learning in children. By using video, young learners become more focused. This focus is created because video presents interesting moving images and audio as well as other variations. This will eliminate extraneous factors that hinder learning objectives. Also, providing information through two channels to the students, audio and visual, will benefit the working memory of the students (Sabgini & Wiraatmaja, 2023). This really helps them to understand the material being taught.

Sr. Emerensiana, ASP revealed that *I use this technique because children today are used to watching videos when they are at home. In addition, I see that when using this technique, children are more enthusiastic and it can have an impact on their absorption of the vocabulary taught. I think learning with this technique is good because it combines audio and visual so it makes them more quickly interested.* Video can improve the classroom atmosphere to be more cheerful,

happy, fun and interesting. Therefore, the use of videos in teaching vocabulary to young learners is the right decision considering the conditions of young learners (Sabgini & Wiraatmaja, 2023). However, based on observation this technique can only be made available to Kinder 2 students due to limited facilities. The teachers confirmed this. According to them, this technique can also be made available to Kinder 1 class, children at the 4–5-year-old level but this has not been possible due to limited facilities.

6. Question and Answer

Based on observations, this technique is usually used by teachers to check students' readiness before the lesson starts and assess students' absorption of the material given in the lesson. This technique is used by teachers to make students more active and arouse their motivation in learning new vocabulary. It is also made to maximize students' speaking opportunities, and acts as a way to check students' understanding of the material taught. The purpose of the question and answer method for early childhood is to train children's courage to submit their ideas, train children's courage to ask what they don't understand, train children to speak with good intonation, develop vocabulary and vocabulary, train children to respect other people's opinions and train children to want to hear or listen to other people's questions and answers (Safira & Naila Fauzia, 2021).

Sr. Imelda, ASP explained that *the questions and answers that occur between teachers and students create interaction between the two. I feel that this interaction through question and answer is important so that we as teachers can measure their abilities. Based on my experience; by doing question and answer, I can know the students' characters better; whether they are quiet, active or hyperactive. From here I can direct them in my way so that they can pronounce words properly.* Along with this, question and answer can provide stimulation for students to be able to think critically and encourage students to try to understand every question given by the teacher. Thus, this method can enable the creation of students' mental process activities to see the relationships that exist in the learning material (Sudjana in Studi et al., (2020). Therefore, the question-and-answer technique is very good for collecting children's ideas or ideas based on what they have heard or experienced.

Through this technique, the child's way of thinking will be open in pronouncing words properly, and can train the child's own reasoning power.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings in this research, it can be concluded that English vocabulary learning for young learners at Sint Paul Kindergarten Maumere is carried out in stages. These stages are in line with the children's developmental levels and abilities at each grade level, which consist of Nursery (3-4 years old), Kinder 1 (4-5 years old), and Kinder 2 (5-6 years old). Teachers recognize that young learners have unique learning characteristics, short attention spans, and require a concrete, engaging, and enjoyable learning approach. Therefore, the vocabulary teaching strategy implemented always focuses on interactive, creative, and experience-based activities.

The results of this research also show that there are several main strategies used by teachers in introducing English vocabulary to students, namely inging, using pictures and drawing, listen and repeat technique, using real thing, using videos, and question and answer technique. Each technique is used according to the needs and developmental level of the children. In the Nursery class, learning focuses more on listening skills through songs and the listen and repeat technique without guiding children to speak individually. In Kinder 1, the strategies are more varied with the addition of pictures, real thing, and physical movements to support children's memory of vocabulary. Meanwhile, in Kinder 2, vocabulary lessons develop to a more complex level through broader themes, the use of videos, drawing activities and worksheets, as well as providing opportunities for children to pronounce vocabulary individually.

Thus, this research concludes that effective English vocabulary teaching strategies for young learners are those that are fun, communicative, multisensory, and contextual. Teachers need to understand the characteristics and abilities of each child and adapt their teaching strategies flexibly. The success of learning depends heavily on the creativity of teachers in creating an engaging learning environment, encouraging active participation, and providing meaningful real-life experiences for

children. This research can be used as a reference for future research that may compare vocabulary teaching strategies in different schools. In addition, future research can also be conducted by measuring more objectively the effectiveness of each vocabulary teaching strategy on young learners using pre-test and post-test instruments.

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