



AN EVALUATION OF ENGLISH FOR YOUNG LEARNERS LEVEL 1 AND 2 BASED ON EARLY LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PRINCIPLES

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Abstract

This study evaluates the English for Young Learners (EYL) Level 1 and Level 2 textbooks through the lens of early childhood language acquisition principles. Employing a qualitative approach, the analysis was conducted via in-depth document review of two widely used elementary-level textbooks. The evaluation focused on their alignment with key principles, including comprehensible input, scaffolding, affective engagement, meaningful language use, and sensitivity to children's cognitive development. Findings indicate that, while the textbooks feature relevant thematic structures and visually appealing, child-friendly illustrations, the instructional design remains predominantly structural in orientation. This limits opportunities for meaningful interaction, multisensory exploration, and the contextualization of learning experiences. Moreover, the range of activities does not sufficiently cater to diverse learning styles. The study recommends substantial content revision and the integration of richer pedagogical strategies, such as project-based tasks, cooperative play, and expressive activities to better reflect the characteristics of early language acquisition and to foster a more natural, engaging, and effective learning process.

Keywords: Textbook Evaluation, Early Language Acquisition, Early English Learning, Comprehensible Input, English for Young Learners.

INTRODUCTION

English language education for early childhood has become a global concern as the demand for multilingual competence increases in the era of globalization. In Indonesia itself, enthusiasm for learning English at the primary level is increasing, which is marked by the widespread use of textbooks such as English for Young Learners (EYL) Level 1 and 2 in various elementary schools, both formal and non-formal. However, the selection and use of textbooks for children cannot be done carelessly. Textbooks must be adapted to the principles of early language acquisition, so as not only to convey material mechanically, but also to support children's cognitive and affective processes in understanding and using second languages naturally and meaningfully (Tantucci & Wang, 2022).

Research in the field of second language acquisition shows that children have unique characteristics in language learning, including sensitivity to linguistic inputs, a need for sensory and socially rich contexts, and a reliance on meaningful interaction patterns (Rod, 2003). In this context, textbooks play a role not only as a source of linguistic information, but also as a mediator of living language experiences. Therefore, the evaluation of textbooks should refer to the principles of initial language acquisition such as exposure to understandable inputs (Krashen, 1982), the role of interaction (Vygotsky, 1980), meaningful repetition, scaffolding, and the child's emotional involvement with the material being studied (Nunan, 2004). If textbooks

ignore these principles, then the learning process risks becoming ineffective or even counterproductive for children.

Unfortunately, many textbooks used in EYL classrooms are structured with a purely structural or grammatical orientation, without regard to early childhood cognitive and affective development. For example, the structure of the book is too dense, the lack of contextual visual support, and the use of target language that is not relevant to the child's world (Cameron, 2001). In this case, English for Young Learners Level 1 and 2 books need to be critically evaluated to find out the extent to which the content is in line with the principles of children's language acquisition. This evaluation is important because the book is widely used as the main material in various educational institutions, but has not been extensively researched in depth from the perspective of children's language acquisition.

In addition, the existence of an Independent Curriculum policy that encourages learning based on student characteristics is also the reason for the need for textbook evaluation. A good book should not only meet content standards, but also be compatible with children's learning styles and appropriate to their linguistic development (Luke, 2012). This research is here to answer the need for an in-depth academic study of English for Young Learners Level 1 and 2 books, with an evaluation approach based on the theory of early language acquisition. The results of this evaluation are expected to provide concrete recommendations for teachers, material developers, and education policy makers in selecting or designing teaching materials that are more child-friendly and effective in encouraging English learning at an early age.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses an evaluative-qualitative approach with a document analysis design to assess the suitability of the content of English for Young Learners Level 1 and 2 books to the principles of language acquisition in early childhood. Document analysis was chosen because this method allows researchers to conduct an in-depth study of educational artifacts such as textbooks, focusing on the structure of the content, linguistic features, learning activities, and visual elements presented (Bowen, 2009). The main data of the study is in the form of two new printed textbooks that are widely used in children's English classes, especially at the elementary school level. This data source was analyzed based on indicators derived from the theory of early language acquisition, such as comprehensible input, scaffolding, affective involvement, repetition, meaningful use, and sensitivity to children's cognitive development (Cameron, 2001; Lightbown & Spada, 2021; Pinter, 2017).

The analysis process is carried out systematically in three stages. The first stage is the identification of the main features of the book, including the learning objectives, the order of the topics, the type of exercise, and the visual representation. The second stage is content mapping on the principles of children's language acquisition, which is prepared in the form of a coding scheme based on the theoretical literature that has been previously reviewed. Each component of the book is evaluated whether or not it supports the principles of children's language acquisition. The third stage is critical interpretation, in which the researcher draws conclusions about the suitability or inconformity of the book to these principles, paying attention to the context of its use in real classes. To increase the credibility and validity of the evaluation results, this study also involved expert triangulation by asking two experts in teaching children's languages and one lecturer in applied linguistics to provide cross-assessment of the results of the initial analysis.

The data analysis techniques used refer to the model Miles et al. (2014) which includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The data collected from the book is coded based on thematic categories, then interpreted with a reflective and argumentative approach. This research also upholds the principle of trustworthiness in qualitative research

which includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is maintained through a strong literature review and validation of findings by experts. Meanwhile, data interpretation is carried out by maintaining analytical distance and avoiding personal assessment biases against the books being analyzed.

With this method, the research is expected not only to provide a factual description of the content of the English for Young Learners Level 1 and 2 books, but also to reflect whether the books are in line with the latest theories in children's language acquisition. The findings of this study are expected to be the foundation for the development of more child-friendly and science-based textbooks, as well as encourage critical understanding of teachers and curriculum makers in choosing effective and contextual English learning materials for early childhood.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The English for Young Learners (EYL) Level 1 & 2 book by Dr. Sayit Abdul Karim, S.Pd., M.Pd. and Diva Kumalasari is an English learning module specifically designed for elementary school and junior high school (SMP) students. Published by Cipta Media Nusantara in 2024, this book is present as a response to the need for teaching materials that are in accordance with the characteristics of children in the context of learning a foreign language. The author realizes that early introduction of English is very important to equip the young generation of Indonesia to face global challenges, so the content of the book is designed to not only convey grammatical aspects, but also consider the stages of children's cognitive and emotional development. Teaching materials are prepared with a thematic and communicative approach, supported by clear learning objectives, diverse classroom activities, and pedagogical notes for teachers. The structure of the book at Level 1 includes six units, namely Numbers, Day and Month, Colour, My Family, My Body, and School Objects, which focus on basic vocabulary and simple expressions relevant to the child's world. Meanwhile, Level 2 is aimed at early learners at the junior high school level with five units that are more oriented towards understanding basic grammatical structures such as the use of to be, do/does, there is/are, have/has, and by. This book also provides reading, writing, listening, and speaking exercises that are tailored to the student's level of development. The use of illustrations, short dialogues, and language games are the hallmarks of this book's approach which aims to create a fun and contextual learning experience. Therefore, this book is worth critically analyzing to see the extent to which it reflects the principles of early childhood language acquisition in theory and practice.

The English for Young Learners (EYL) Level 1 & 2 modules are two-level learning packages designed to introduce English to children through a thematic, visual, and communicative approach. At Level 1, learning is focused on recognizing basic vocabulary that is familiar to children, such as numbers, days and months, colors, families, body parts, and objects at school. Each unit is equipped with learning objectives, vocabulary lists, pronunciation examples with phonetic transcription, and exercises that vary from matching pictures, completing sentences, to reading aloud. The book emphasizes a multisensory approach by blending reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

Meanwhile, Level 2 invites students to begin to understand the basic structure in English sentences, including the use of to be, do/does, there is/are, have/has, and the preposition by. The material is packed with simple explanations, dialogues that describe daily situations, practice questions, and games and small project-based activities that involve cooperation between students. The emphasis on positive, negative, and interrogative sentence forms becomes the main focal point at this level, while still maintaining a child-friendly learning style. This book also provides space for teachers through teaching notes that suggest differentiation approaches and meaningful repetition to make learning more effective. Overall, this module reflects the spirit of teaching English that is fun, easy to understand and contextual, although it still needs to be further examined to the extent to which the content is in line with theories of children's scientific language acquisition.

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The results of the analysis of English for Young Learners (EYL) Level 1 & 2 books show that this book is designed with good intentions to introduce English to early children, but in its application it is not fully aligned with the basic principles of language acquisition in children. In terms of content structure, this book is divided into two main levels: Level 1 which is intended for elementary school students in the early grade, and Level 2 for junior high school students. Level 1 contains six thematic units that contain concrete vocabulary that is close to the child's life, such as numbers, colors, family members, and school objects. This material is quite relevant and contextual in introducing foreign languages to children, in accordance with the principles of contextualized input suggested by Cameron (2001). The visuals used also tend to be interesting and child-friendly, with many color illustrations, although some of the images seem not explicit enough or do not support optimal reinforcement of meaning.

From the perspective of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982), this book is quite successful in presenting simple vocabulary and sentences that can be understood by beginner learners, especially at Level 1. However, sentence composition in some parts tends to be repetitive with no meaningful variation, and focuses too much on direct translation or memorization of word forms. This reduces the child's potential to understand language as a natural and functional means of communication. For example, exercises such as "connect lines", "circle words", or "fill in the dots" dominate the form of activity, whereas the child's language acquisition approach encourages the use of collaborative and interactive activities that involve meaning negotiation and spontaneous responses from children (Pinter, 2017). In addition, Level 2 is more oriented towards grammatical structure with terms such as to be, do/does, and have/has presented in a declarative manner. The presentation, although packed with examples of simple dialogue and stories, remains overly grammatical and not sufficiently based on concrete experiences or communicative needs of children, something that should be avoided in an early language learning approach (Ellis, 2015).

In terms of the use of scaffolding or step-by-step learning aids, this book includes teaching notes for teachers in each unit. This is a positive element because it provides direction on how to deliver the material, but the notes are still technical and do not explicitly emphasize the importance of meaningful interaction between teachers and students. In fact, according to Vygotsky (1980), social interaction is the main foundation in children's language acquisition. Ideally, books can more actively encourage teachers to adjust their approach based on the child's proximal developmental zone (ZPD), rather than just carrying out instructions. In terms of emotional engagement, although the illustrations and dialogue tone in the book are quite friendly and friendly, the deep emotional approach to building the relationship between children and language is still not widely seen. For example, activities that involve expressing feelings, recounting personal experiences, or role-playing are still very limited.

One of the strengths of this book lies in the use of phonetic transcription in early vocabulary at Level 1, which can assist teachers in teaching pronunciation. However, this phonology learning has not been associated with multisensory activities that are usually more effective for children. Likewise, repetition, which is indeed given in the form of repetitive exercises, but is not balanced with meaningful recycling, which is repetition in different contexts that help children interpret words more flexibly (Lightbown & Spada, 2021). In addition, the differences in children's learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) are not much facilitated by the variety of activities in this book. For example, there is no explicit section that encourages language exploration through body movements, songs, or other kinesthetic activities, even though a multisensory approach is strongly recommended in children's language learning (Garton & Tekin, 2022).

Considering all aspects, English for Young Learners Level 1 & 2 has the potential to be an early teaching material, but to achieve greater effectiveness in supporting children's language acquisition, it needs to be revised to be more child-centered, communicative, and experience-based. Rearranging the material by integrating task-based activities, contextual dialogue from the children's real world, and more teacher-student interaction can strengthen this book as a tool that is in line with the theory of children's language acquisition. This evaluation also emphasizes the importance of training for teachers in interpreting and modifying textbooks, so that they remain adaptive to the learning needs of students who are very dynamic at an early age.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of an in-depth evaluation of the English for Young Learners Level 1 & 2 book, it can be concluded that this book has shown a positive effort in providing child-friendly and contextual English learning materials. This book presents thematic content that is relevant to the children's world, provides interesting illustrations, and lists learning objectives and classroom activities that are quite varied. However, when measured by the principles of language acquisition in early childhood, there are still a number of significant weaknesses. The presentation of material is still too focused on grammatical structure, there is little exploration of social and affective learning experiences, and it does not fully facilitate the multisensory approach that is key in children's language learning. In addition, the variety of activities has not fully accommodated diverse learning styles, and teacher-student interaction has not been maximized through the available materials.

Although this book provides teaching notes for teachers, the approach is still technically skewed and has not encouraged meaningful interaction-based learning or holistic child cognitive development. Therefore, revision and enrichment of the material are needed to make this book more in line with the learning characteristics of children. This includes the integration of project-based activities, cooperative play, expressive activities such as storytelling and role-playing, as well as an emphasis on the use of language as a means of communication, rather than just an object of memorization. In addition, teacher training that is oriented towards children's language acquisition pedagogy is an important step so that this book can be used optimally in the classroom. Overall, these results show that English for Young Learners Level 1 & 2 books have the potential to develop into powerful teaching materials, but require further adjustment to truly support natural, fun and meaningful language acquisition for children.

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