
OPTIMIZING VAKOG AS HUMAN SENSES IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English for young learners always gets more attention. It is because young learners are very unique. They have many characters which can change rapidly in one time. Sometimes, they display an enthusiasm for learning and a curiosity about the world around them. They also have a need for individual attention and approval from the teacher. They are keen to talk about themselves, and respond well to learning that uses themselves and their own lives as main topics in the classroom. However, they also have a limited attention span. They can easily get bored, losing interest after ten minutes if the activities are not extremely engaging. Considering those characters, there should be good ways how to treat children in delivering materials. One of ways is by exposing and utilizing children's senses. The senses are Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Olfactory, and Gustatory (VAKOG). It will be very useful because a teacher not only gives something to be seen but also invites them to get involved mentally and physically. In this case, the teacher will prepare a set of teaching material where this material has very tight relationship with activities done in class. For instance, when teacher will teach part of body, she or he will prepare some pictures, songs, games, and other activities related to body's part. These are intended to strengthen children's knowledge.

Keywords: Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Olfactory, Gustatory

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching English for children must be fun and enjoyable. It is because children have very unique characteristics. Their characteristics can change rapidly in one time. Sometimes, they display an enthusiasm for learning and a curiosity about the world around them. They also have a need for individual attention and approval from the teacher. They are keen to talk about themselves, and respond well to learning that uses themselves and their own lives as main topics in the classroom. However, they

also have a limited attention span. They can easily get bored, losing interest after ten minutes if the activities are not extremely engaging.

As a result, there are some teachers who get difficulties in handling them as students. Some of teachers said that it is quite difficult when they have to deliver a certain material. It leads to teacher's conclusion that they are "Naughty".

Considering the fact above, this paper will give solution how to overcome the problem by discussing the following items:

a) The characteristics of children, b) How they learn English as a foreign language, c) The way of teaching children, c) The implementation of VAKOG, and d) A package of Teaching English for Young Learners.

There are many approaches in teaching English to young learners. The use of appropriate approach can facilitate the learning process. However, in the reality, there are many teachers who have not been able to select and choose the suitable approach. As a result, most of students get difficulty in learning English. Referring to the background above, this research aims to find out how the process of optimizing VAKOG as human senses in teaching English for young learners is and how the students responses toward the implementation of VAKOG are.

Children Characteristics

Many children, perhaps the majority of children in the world, are exposed to more than one language in early childhood. Children who hear more than one language virtually from birth are sometimes referred to as ‘simultaneous bilingual’, where those who begin to learn a second language later are referred to as ‘sequential bilingual’. There is a considerable body of research on the ability of young children to learn more than one language in their earliest years. In this essay, the term “young learners” means students from the first grade of elementary school (six or seven years old) to the sixth grade of elementary school (eleven or twelve years old). Teaching English at this level needs a lot of attention and efforts as the years at primary school are extremely important in young learners’ intellectual,

physical, emotional, and social development (Phillips, 1995:5-6).

Intellectually, young learners go through a series of stages, progressively acquiring skills that are thought necessary by the society they live in. While on the physical side, young learners need to develop balance, spatial awareness, and fine control of certain muscle in order to play sport and perform everyday action. Emotionally and socially, these young learners need to develop a series of characteristics to enable them to fit into the society they live in. According to Williams (1994:208) quoted by Setiawati, L. (2002:115) there are seven principles that should be considered in carrying out teaching-learning activities. They are interest, challenge, purpose, language use, language input, conceptual appropriateness, and promotion of learning.

Young children, especially those up to the ages of nine or ten, learn differently from older children, adolescents, and adults in the following ways:

- They respond to meaning even if they do not understand individual words.
- They often learn indirectly rather than directly – that is they take in information from all sides, learning from everything around them rather than only focusing on the precise topic they are being taught.
- Their understanding comes not just from explanation, but also from what they see and hear and, crucially, have a chance to touch and interact with.
- They generally display an enthusiasm for learning and a curiosity about the world around them.
- They have a need for individual attention and approval from the teacher.

- They are keen to talk about themselves, and respond well to learning that uses themselves and their own lives as main topics in the classroom.
- They have a limited attention span; unless activities are extremely engaging they can easily get bored, losing interest after ten minutes or so (Harmer, 2001: 38).

In the light of these characteristics, it can be concluded that good teachers at this level need to provide a rich diet of learning experiences which encourages their students to get information from a variety of sources. They need to work with their students individually and in groups developing good relationship. They need to plan a range of activities for a given time period, and be flexible enough to move on to next exercise when they see their students getting bored.

How they Learn English as a Foreign Language

Children learn language through play and purposeful activity, naturally and in an environment that invites risk taking, poses no anxiety, and applauds all effort. And such learning is best served by teachers who always facilitate, guide, and model this process, while being expansive in their gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice. With the focus always on what a child is trying to do, practice activities should be related to his/her actual language needs. It is

in the line with Piaget (1970) cited in Shin (2011) that children are active learners and thinkers.

Children construct knowledge from actively interacting with the physical environment in developmental stages. They learn through their own individual actions and exploration. This is backed up by Vygotsky (1962) in Shin (2011) that children learn through social interaction. Children construct knowledge through other people, through interaction with adults. Adults/teachers work actively with children in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Those theories are also supported by Cameron (2001). It is stated that the adult's role is very important in a child's learning process. Like Vygotsky, Bruner focused on the importance of language in a child's cognitive development. He shows how the adult uses "scaffolding" to guide a child's language learning through finely-tuned talk.

According to Phillips (1995:7) the young learners learn a foreign language, and therefore the way to teach it, obviously depends on their development stages. By following the students' developmental stages, teachers will get a great advantage as to prepare appropriate activities for the appropriate level of young learners.

Table 1 shows the developmental characteristics of young learners (ages 5 – 10) according to Rhodes, Curtain, and Has as quoted by Shrum (1994:113).

Table 1. Developmental Characteristics of Young Learners

| Age | Physical | Cognitive | Social |
|------------|---|--|---|
| 5/6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large and small motor skills developing. • Very active | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need concrete objects as base for experience • Still learning bulk of the language. • Limited by "Cent ration" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • egocentric • uninhibited • friendly • need structure |

| | | | |
|------|--|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short attention span. • Fatigue easily | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can classify along one dimension • Think in terms of associating words with meanings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • need praise • see self as physical traits • interact with peers more as friends • enjoy fantasy play |
| 7/8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • refining large and small motor skills • longer attention span • on task longer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greater ability to reason • interest in how and why relationships • reading and writing • language may be ahead of concepts • can construct a series (small to big) • can classify hierarchically • still need concrete experiences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more separate sense of self • more reflective • go by rules • stronger friendships |
| 9/10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skill well developed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reading and writing well established • can classify along more than one dimension • can think logically • can “conserve” • analyze work critically • still need concrete experiences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased autonomy • sensitive to differences • friendships are important and peer-oriented (same sex) • judgmental |

Besides young learners’ developmental stages, there are some common characteristics of them that should be taken care of in planning and designing the teaching program. According to Scott (1994:2-3), the characteristics that may be shared by all young learners are that:

1. They use language skills before they are aware of them. Therefore, acquisition of languages is possible without self-consciousness at an early age (Brumfit, 1994:vii).
2. They consider physical worlds as dominant at all times. Therefore, the teaching learning activities should be referred most to the physical movements and activities such as the presentation of real objects, pictures, actions, gesture, and all facial expressions. As a result, young learners’ language learning is more closely integrated with real

communication because it depends more on the immediate physical environment (Brumfit, 1994:vii).

3. They have a very short attention and concentration span. Scott (1994:5) insists that variety in the classroom is a must – variety of activity, variety of pace, variety of organization and variety of voice.
4. They love to play, and learn best when they are enjoying themselves. As a result, selecting an interesting activity is an important thing to do (Ur, 1996: 288).
5. They are enthusiastic and positive about learning. Because of this, young learners are better motivated than adults (Brumfit, 1994: vii)

Another point should get attention from teacher related to teaching for young learner is Multiple Intelligences (MI). Sólmundardóttir (2008) stated that it is very

important for students' self-esteem that they find their strengths and that they know how to use them. It can be interpreted that by recognizing and using the strengths in appropriate way, students can build and upgrade their self-confidence. She gives more statements that it is therefore important for teachers to know how to work with the different intelligences and be able to use various teaching methods. The activities

have to be appealing and suitable for the students and it is good to work with different intelligences together in order to get the students to develop the intelligences that they are weaker in. Understanding the numerous ways that children acquire knowledge enables teachers to use a variety of strategies to reach children with different types of intelligence. To know further dealing with MI, it can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Multiple Intelligences and Their Applications to the Language Classroom

| Intelligence | Excels at | Language Application |
|----------------------|---|---|
| Linguistic | Reading, writing, telling stories, playing word games, etc. | Almost everything we do in class! |
| Logical-Mathematical | Experimenting, questioning, figuring out logical puzzles, calculating, etc. | |
| Spatial | Designing, drawing, visualizing, doodling, etc. | Illustrating a Gouin series; creating a picture of an object by writing the word for the object over and over |
| Bodily-Kinesthetic | Dancing, running, jumping, activities adding motions to songs and chants | Total Physical Response (TPR), building, touching, gesturing, etc. |
| Musical | Singing, whistling, humming, creating melodies for favorite rhymes | Using songs and rhythmic chants, tapping feet and hands, listening, etc. |
| Interpersonal | Leading, organizing, relating, manipulating, mediating, partying, etc. | Small group and partner work |
| Intrapersonal | Setting goals, meditating, dreaming, planning, being quiet | Journaling, portfolio building |
| Naturalist | Understanding, categorizing, explaining things in the world of nature | Photography, field trips, classifying |

Sources: Adapted from Gardner (1983, 1993, 1999) and Armstrong (1993, 1994)

It is expected by having known students' characteristics and the way they learn, a

teacher can easily prepare, design, and choose appropriate materials. Thus, the

teacher will treat students in an appropriate way because every single steps of teaching has been well planned and designed.

Ways of Teaching Children

Referring to the characteristics of children, teacher needs to pay attention in teaching them. Shin (2007) proposed ten helpful ideas for teaching English to young learners. 1) Supplement activities with visuals, realia, and movement. Young learners tend to have short attention spans and a lot of physical energy. In addition, children are very much linked to their surroundings and are more interested in the physical and the tangible. As Scott and Ytreberg (1990) in Shin (2007) describes, "Their own understanding comes through hands and eyes and ears. The physical world is dominant at all times." This can be done by using brightly colored visuals, toys, puppets or objects, creating a visuals and realia bank, and using Total Physical Response (TPR). 2) Involve students in making visuals and realia. Having children involved in creating the visuals that are related to the lesson helps engage students in the learning process by introducing them to the context as well as to relevant vocabulary items. Students are more likely to feel interested and invested in the lesson and will probably take better care of the materials. In order to involve students in teaching learning process, teacher can guide and order students to draw different characters for a story or to make puppets, masks, play-do sculptures. It also can be done by collaborating with the art teacher to make the visuals for supporting the activities. 3) Move from activity to activity. Young learners have short attention spans. For ages 5–7, keep activities around 5 and 10 minutes long. For ages 8–10, keep

activities 10 to 15 minutes long. Thus, it is recommended for teacher to combine some activities in order to create an interesting teaching. For example: by applying quiet/noisy exercises, individual/ pair work/ group work/ whole class activities, or teacher-pupil/ pupil-pupil activities. 4) Teach in themes. A thematic unit, a series of lessons on the same topic or subject, can create broader contexts in which to teach language, recycle language from lesson to lesson, and allow students to focus more on content and communication than on language structure. Those themes are transportation, family, environment, profession, etc. 5) Use stories and contexts familiar to students. Use of stories and contexts in home country or culture can help YLs connect English with their background knowledge, which is limited because of their young age and inexperience. Stories and contexts are also very useful for students to engage the contents in order to be kept in long term. As a result, students, in another occasion, can recall the words and use them in real communication. 6) Establish classroom routines in English. YLs function well within a structured environment and enjoy repetition of certain routines and activities. Having basic routines in the classroom can help to manage young learners. It can be assumed that by providing classroom routines in English, it can be used to maintain the language got in the previous activities. Three of classroom routines include clapping short rhythms for students to repeat, starting the lesson with song or chant, and adding classroom language to the routines as well. 7) Use L1 as a resource when necessary. Teaching English for young learners in a country where English is not spoken needs a bilingual teacher. The

teacher should have or possess L1 and L2. It means that if the students do not understand to a certain word, teacher can explain by switching or using L1. 8) Bring in helpers from the community. 9) Collaborate with other teachers in your school. This way is quite wise to make collaborative teaching. It is necessary for a teacher to share knowledge each other in order to get new experience in handling students. 10) Communicate with other TEYL professionals. Sometimes, a TEYL teacher gets deadlock in treating students. It is very understandable because students have many characteristics. However, it is not wise if the teacher complains toward the students' behavior. To overcome this condition, the teacher should consult and communicate with TEYL professionals. It is intended to minimize problem in teaching learning process.

METHODOLOGY

Case study is employed to answer the research questions. This is relevant to Merriam's (1988) and McMilan and Schumacher (2001) statement that case study can be classified as an evaluated study because it involves description, explanation and judgements people's individual and collective social actions, benefits, thoughts and perceptions. In addition case study has several categories which are classified by Yin (2009); they are exploratory, descriptive and exploratory case studies. In this research, the researchers focused on descriptive case study. Descriptive case study sets to describe the natural phenomena which occurs within the data in question (Zainal:2007), for instance, this study finds out what teacher's preparation before teaching and also teacher's and students'

activity before, during and after activities by using VAKOG. Besides, in this research, the researchers also act as participant observer because they hold the position of the teacher as well in the classroom.

The research was taken place at SD Islam Tirtayasa- Serang. A purposive sampling was used in this research. According to Arikunto (2006) purposive sampling is the technique of sampling used by the writer that concern on some consideration (limitation of time, energy, and fund) in order to acquire a certain objective. Thus, to make the teaching and observation run effectively, the students of second grade were taken as participant.

To collect the data, the researchers relied on qualitative method to find out the teacher's way to teach vocabulary to young students through VAKOG. Classroom observation, students' interview and teachers' journal were the main sources of data collection. The researchers used qualitative data analysis from Miles Huberman (1994:10) analysis as consisting of three current flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After revealing the characteristics and the way students learn, it is time to discuss one of ways how to wrap material for teaching children. It is called "VAKOG" as learning styles. It stands for Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic, Olfactory, and Gustatory. VAKOG is a package of how to treat students, especially for young learners. It contains activities which involve both mental and physical aspects. This combination is expected to be helpful for assisting teacher to teach students in a right portion. It

is done by considering the characteristics of students. The definitions of these learning styles are as follows (Gilakjani and Ahmadi 2011).

Visual Style

According to a certain institution (Child central, 2007) available on website, it is estimated that 80 percent of what we learn is through our vision. From an early age, a child acquires valuable information about his surroundings through his or her eyes. Because of this fact, normal schooling makes use of methods that favor visual learners. Children who are primarily visual learners tend to get information through reading books. They can also learn more from pictures and other visual materials. If you notice that your child is tidy and organized in their learning habits, then he might be a visual learner. Students of this style are drawn to paintings, crafts, and other arts. They also have a wonderful sense of imagination and are known to be very creative.

Visual learners think in pictures and learn best in visual images. They depend on the instructor's or facilitator's nonverbal cues such as body language to help with understanding. Sometimes, visual learners favour sitting in the front of the classroom. They also take descriptive notes over the material being presented.

Auditory Style

These individuals discover information through listening and interpreting information by the means of pitch, emphasis and speed. These individuals gain knowledge from reading out loud in the classroom and may not have a full understanding of information that is written

For some children, their sense of sound allows them to gather large volumes of information and have them processed accordingly. A child is most probably an auditory learner if he or she is good at listening to instructions and is very sensitive to variations in spoken words. They excel in gaining knowledge from conversations and lectures. Because listening requires more concentration than seeing, students of this learning style can be more discerning. They are usually more attentive in class and can distinguish different ideas just by listening to them. Because information revealed through speaking is not usually recorded accurately in class, the memory capacity of auditory learners exceeds those of visual learners. Children of this type also enjoy studying with music in the background. Auditory children also can pick up instruments rather quickly. You can find music teachers that specialize in auditory teaching. For them, sounds provide the best medium of instruction. Unlike other students, these kinds of learners do not get bored easily with teachers who are fond of lectures. If your child is an auditory learner, he or she can also be creative and have an imaginative mind. Without relying heavily on visual models, auditory learners become skilled at interpreting information and reproducing them using their own understanding. Students of this classification often stand out in college because they enjoy class lectures and find listening to teachers a rewarding activity. However, because regular schools favor visual learning, auditory learners can find it hard to gain useful education from them. As a result, many students have to enroll in home schooling programs to enhance their skills. Home schooling can be programmed in such

a way that it gives auditory learners the opportunity to learn using a medium they are familiar with and find no faults with. If you think that your child is of this learning style, then you may want to find a suitable program that will help you and your child develop his potential without sacrificing his listening skills.

Kinaesthetic Style

Individuals that are kinaesthetic learn best with an active “hands-on” approach. These learners favour interaction with the physical world. Most of the time kinaesthetic learners have a difficult time staying on target and can become unfocused effortlessly.

A child who has a kinesthetic learning style cannot just sit still and wait for information to be given. They surpass in finding out things for themselves without any needs for guidance. Explorers at heart, kinesthetic learners are known to be quite active even before a lesson proper. Their natural curiosity drives them to make new discoveries, making it hard for regular schools to limit their movement. Children of this learning style are often mistaken to be rowdy and undisciplined. That however, is a grave misconception. Kinaesthetic learners always seem to be moving around because they see their surroundings differently. For them, the world is just a huge playground full of wonderful things they want to discover and explore. Your child is probably a kinesthetic learner if he or she is fond of tinkering with toys, trying to find out how they work. They are also quick learners, especially when left alone to examine a particular object. These children can quickly put one and one together and have a great capacity to understand complex processes and procedures. A student who exhibits this

particular learning behavior is always at the forefront of experimentation and exploration. They excel in discovering how machines operate and how a process works. Students of this particular behavior are more of doers than thinkers.

Olfactory Style

Olfaction or olfactory perception is the sense of smell. Children learn to discriminate between good and bad odors and make the connection between eating and smelling. The Olfactory Learner learns best through the sense of smell and taste, smells have a special significance, associates a particular smell with specific past memories, is frequently able to identify smells, and finds that smells add to learning. Strategies for Olfactory Sense (Smell):

- a. Hypersensitivity: apply lotion or cream under the nostrils
- b. Hypo-sensitivity: introduce child to food with strong smell; walk around smelly places and talk about the smell of flowers.

Gustatory Style

Gustatory is defined as something of or pertaining to the sense of taste. Taste refers to the ability to respond to dissolved molecules and ions known as tastants. Humans detect taste using their taste receptor cells. The child learns to recognize tastes such as sweet, bitter, sour, salt etc. There are strategies for Gustatory Sense (Taste)

Oral defensive

A teacher can introduce new food taste through food play, do facial massage before a meal, introduce one new experience at a time (new tastes and textures), and use

proprioceptive activities such as chewing or blowing games before a meal.

Oral Seeking

We can order our students to use activities that make the mouth and surrounding structures work hard.

The following item is the activities for Gustatory Sense and Olfactory Sense

- 1) Blowing bubbles with a straw
- 2) Suck drinks with squiggly straws or thin straw
- 3) Eat chewy foods such as gummy bears, and crunchy foods such as carrots, crackers.
- 4) Smell and Tell game – have different items placed on the table such as lemons, coffee, scented markers, soap, etc. Allow child to smell and tell the items.
- 5) Taste and Tell game – have different food items that has sweet, sour, spicy, salty taste; allow child to taste and tell the food items.

Students' response

In getting the data whether students gave good response or not, the researchers observed all activities in the class. This observation consisted of three sections, namely Pre Teaching, Whilst Teaching, and Post Teaching.

1) Pre Teaching

When researchers came to the class in early time, the students gave different responses which were expressed through their faces, gesture, and body movement. Most of them welcomed enthusiastically by giving good response. It can be interpreted that nearly all students gave positive way, event tough it was the first time to meet.

2) Whilst Teaching

In this step, researchers applied some activities related to the topics. These activities were combination of learning styles in order to explore and expose all students' characteristic. Hence, the students who had introvert characteristics could take activities which provoke them to speak and act more than usual.

Thus, when researchers introduced the topic and the activities which were going to be learnt, they were very expressive in involving teaching learning process. Their positive responses seemed clearer when they had to do physical activities; for example in Run and Slam game. They did this game very well. They run and slammed the pictures attached on the wall.

3) Post Teaching

At the end of teaching, students still did physical activities. It was intended in order the students could strengthen what they had learnt from the early time.

CONCLUSION

A package of teaching English for a young learner which is done in this research includes three main steps namely presentation stage, practice stage and production stage. Most of the students welcomed enthusiastically by giving good response. It can be interpreted that nearly all students gave positive way, event tough it was the first time to meet. Their positive responses also seemed clearer when they had to do physical activities; for example in Run and Slam game. They did this game very well. They run and slammed the pictures attached on the wall. At the end of teaching, students still did physical activities. It was intended in order the

students could strengthen what they had learnt from the early time.

By having some characteristics of young learners, it demands teachers to create, design, and teach in different ways of teaching in order to catch students'

attention. VAKOG, as a learning style, is proposed to overcome some problems happened in the class. By applying this learning style, it is expected for the teacher to blend VAKOG to be fun and enjoyable teaching and learning process.

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