



Teachers' Perceptions of Montessori's Pedagogy in Teaching English Through Poetry to Indonesian EFL Young Learners

Fitriyani Bakri^{1*}, Muh. Hasbi² and Abd.Halim³

^{1,2,3}Department of English, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

*fitriyanibakri@unm.ac.id

Abstract

The study explores the perceptions of Indonesian teachers in the EFL classroom using Montessori's pedagogy in poetry teaching. This study employs a descriptive study using the purposive sampling technique. The participants are teachers of an elementary school in the Makassar metropolitan area. The questionnaire and interview were used to collect data on perceptions of EFL teachers in using Montessori's pedagogy in teaching English through poetry to young learners. The observation was applied to gain the data on the EFL teacher's teaching practices in implementing the Montessori's pedagogy in teaching English. The results of the study demonstrate that there were marked differences in the way the teachers perceive Montessori's pedagogy in teaching English through poetry. The differences fall into 3 categories: (1) Highly Implemented of Montessori's pedagogy (HIMM); (2) Moderately Implemented of Montessori's Pedagogy (MIMM); and (3) Lowly Implemented of Montessori's Pedagogy (LIMM). This study expects to be a beneficial reference for teachers, the government, and other young learner practitioners.

Key words: Montessori's pedagogy, poetry, teachers' perception, young learner.

Introduction

Teaching English to young learners (TEYL) was long seen as something unnoticed in ELT. Opinions on the unpopularity of the TEYL field are not groundless. For this reason, as [1] noted, within 20 years, the learning concept of young learners is quite affecting parents, teachers, and other educational practitioners, and English is increasingly viewed as a core generic skill by educational policymakers worldwide and an essential component of school and university curricula designed to prepare students for life and work in a globalized world. The Era of globalization demands all circles to master English orally and in writing. These demands make parents race their children into schools that offer English as one of the subjects, buy many English coursebooks and sometimes give additional classes of English to their child, so they are more fluent in English [2]. The study also suggested that the quality of English teachers for young learners has always been improved in keeping with the demand or attention of parents and the child itself to English.

This field (TEYL) is not an easy thing, but also not a possible one. [3] highlighted that job as a teacher of young learners you need to be aware of preparing care and instruction. Care is providing needs so that they can thrive and focus on learning. Provide possible instruction means, teachers need educational experiences to meet the

developmental stages of a child. Some pedagogies of learning are always developed and tested to see the reactions and outcomes of the pedagogy.

English learning for young learners in Indonesia for a decade began to be familiar with one of the pedagogy developed by Dr. Maria Montessori, known as the Montessori's pedagogy. Since its introduction in the early 20th century, Montessori's pedagogy emphasizes the freedom of children and building an environment that supports each child's development [4]. In another research, [5] also talked about the personal development of young learners, where special educational materials were used to keep children interested in students and there was an emphasis on "practical life skills". This study talked about how children implemented the English language in their learning process, the findings of this study provided insights on the situation and ways of teaching, learning that can be used to develop tools for evaluating and enhancing the implementation of Montessori's pedagogy in Montessori's schools.

Montessori's pedagogy places students as learning centers, this is different from other learning pedagogies that put teachers as a source of information and attention. Because of its role as a manager, teachers should have a good level of knowledge, experience, and perceptions in the field of child growth because the teacher will provide instructions individually according to the students' developmental stages. The role of the teacher believed by the Montessori's pedagogy is in line with the learning concept of children submitted by [6] then reintroduced to the research in the year 2003, on the study she highlighted the uniqueness of young English learners who can have different language learning outcomes according to what they got before entering class. As teachers, teachers should be able to improve their ability to handle the class and play a good role as child-watching leaders [2]. It means you have to have good perceptions as a teacher.

In Taiwan, [7] found that Taiwanese college English teachers' positive perceptions under the CLT principles can make English teaching effective and meaningful. Based on Montessori's pedagogy [8],[9], Montessori English teachers should refer to the following concepts :

1. Activities in the classroom consist of 80% of free activity and 20% of teacher-led activities.
2. Doing various tasks that encourage thinking about social relationships.
3. Offering opportunities for social relationships through free interaction
4. The arguments are found by learners, not presented by the teacher.
5. The pronunciation rules are obtained through pattern recognition, not by memorizing every aspect of the curriculum involving thought.

Integrated Islamic Elementary School Ar Rahmah Makassar (SDIT Ar-Rahmah, Makassar) is one of the schools in South Sulawesi, which has been implementing Montessori's pedagogy in English learning. This pedagogy was chosen to be used in English learning because the school management saw this pedagogy centered on the students and using a concrete language system. On this basis, researchers researched the teacher's perceptions of Montessori's pedagogy in teaching English poetry to children.

At the level of elementary school, especially in SDIT Ar Rahmah, the poem was introduced early to the students as well as a medium of language learning and literature. The school management of SDIT Ar Rahmah assumed that if the poem is taught with the correct pedagogy, students can enjoy the beauty of poetic poetry, can enjoy the literary work, and can communicate well. Would this not all lead us toward better language and literature learning? in the process of searching for more effective language teaching pedagogy, Montessori's Pedagogy was applied to the learning of poetry in this school.

Methodology

The research pedagogy used in this study is a qualitative approach. Creswell said that the qualitative approach aims to explore and understand the issues of individuals or groups such as behavior, motivation, and action [10]. This study used a pedagogy survey aimed at teachers' perceptions towards the application of Montessori's Pedagogy in teaching English through poetry. The survey was conducted on 5 English teachers at SDIT Ar Rahmah Makassar. In collecting data, the researcher used a questionnaire, observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The questionnaire was used to obtain teachers' understanding of Montessori's Pedagogy, and then observation and video recordings are used in the learning process. In-depth interviews were used to obtain more information about the teachers' perceptions toward the Montessori's Pedagogy in teaching English through poetry. Subsequently, data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive techniques. The statements of the questionnaire are as follows:

Answer: (a) I agree (b) I doubt it (c) I disagree

Findings and Discussion

Table 1. Statements on Teachers' Perceptions' of Montessori's Pedagogy in Teaching English Through Poetry

No	Categories	Statements
1	General	<i>As a teacher, I act as a manager who regulates the order of learning poetry without disturbing the students' discussion process</i>
2	Class Activity	<i>As a teacher, I act as a manager who regulates the order of learning poetry without disturbing the students' discussion process</i>
3	Class Activity	<i>I play the role of the leader in the class and the students act as the owner of the class.</i>
4	Class Activity	<i>To get students closer to poetry, activities in the poetry class are filled with activities that free students to do activities that support sensory recognition (according to the Montessori's Pedagogy)</i>
5	Opportunities for Social Relationship	<i>I give the students 30-45 minutes to read the given poem independently</i>
6	Opportunities for Social Relationship	<i>After 30 minutes, I guide students to read the poem and ask their opinion or difficulties in understanding the words</i>
7	Opportunities for Social Relationship	<i>Students can discuss with their selected classmates or friends about the poem</i>
8	Opportunities for Social Relationship	<i>Students find that some of their friends have different opinions on the poem</i>
9	Opportunities for Social Relationship	<i>In the discussion process, students respect each other about the differences of opinion that arise related to the given poem</i>
10	Opportunities for Social Relationship	<i>As a teacher, I provide many opportunities for students to express their opinions about the poem being discussed</i>

Findings

The author distributed a questionnaire to five (5) teachers who taught English in the school. All five teachers are willing to answer the questionnaire and are very cooperative in-class interviews as well as in observation sessions. So the poll response rate is 100%. Moreover, the headmaster of SDIT Ar Rahmah also strongly supports this research in hopes that this research can be one of the references in taking the next school-based curriculum policy.

The teachers were originally given polling containing 10 statements and must be replied with "I agree", "I doubt it", or "I disagree". These 10 statements were further analyzed and elaborated in the interview and class observation sessions. The response of the 10 statements was categorized into two categories of Montessori class features in poetry learning. The categories are (A) Class Activity; (B) Opportunities for Social Relationship. It has been studied that according to [8],[9], and [11] there are five (5) fundamental characteristics in the Montessori's Pedagogy, but the researchers took only two (2) traits that are related to class activity and learning objectives in teaching social interactions.

Class Activity

One feature of learning with Montessori's Pedagogy is the portion of activity within the classroom should be divided into 80% of free activity and 20% of teacher-led activity. It means that students must be given more freedom in expressing their ideas and opinion about the lesson or the topic given by the teacher. The teacher must limit his/her portion during the learning process and can be acted as the manager or the leader of the class. There are three (3) statements (no. 2-4) related to this and approved or fully agreed by 3 teachers (60%), answered doubtfully by 1 teacher (20%), and is not approved by 1 teacher (20%).

During the class observation session, the researchers observed how the teacher implemented this Montessori feature in teaching. The teacher who agreed with this statement seemed to be more prepared and performed guidance and material introduction about the poem at the beginning of the session in about 20 minutes. The poems chosen are animal-themed poems and fun experiences. The theme of poems given to children must be that pleasing them, close to their lives and they can do what they find in poetry. One type of poem suitable for children is limerick [12]. Limerick is suitable for children because of its unique composition, it only has 5 lines and has a unique rhyme or sound equation so it is easy to create and interesting to read. Consider the example of the old limerick poem below:

Opportunities for Social Relationship

Children need to move and adults need to give children the opportunity to explore their environment to build social relationships. This is important particularly for children in pre-school and elementary school age who are traditionally viewed as highly active and is in line with studies conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom that found that children engage in relatively little moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity [13].

Building a social relationship with students of elementary school is important to prepare them to face real life with different types of human characters and social classes. The more frequently the students interact with other people the more socially competent they will be. A study has shown that socially competent children will be more academically successful while poor social skills are a strong predictor of academic failure [14].

In building the students' social competence, teachers encourage the students to explore their neighborhoods. Exploring the neighborhood includes getting to know nearby people such as classmates, teachers, parents of classmates, school guards, and schoolmates. Children will know how to make friends, how to borrow something, how

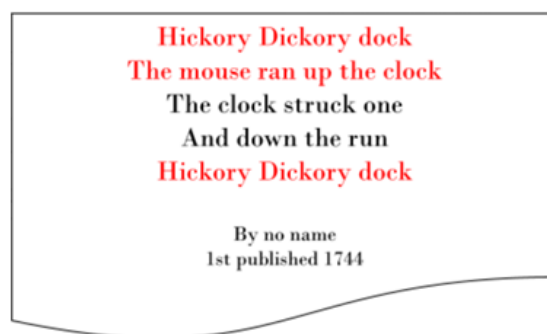


Figure 1. The Old Limerick

to express their wishes by being allowed to explore. While exploring, the children will find a variety of concepts through direct experience and concrete received by their senses. The experience they get will be a positive role in the development of child social relationships so that the children do not become closed and lonely. The role of teachers to support this exploration period is very important. The main task of a teacher is to observe the class and ensure that all students participate in social activities and not just to focus on instructing students.

Questions or statements related to this were number 5 to number 10. When the questions or statements that lead to the role of the Montessori's Pedagogy in giving the child the opportunity to socialize through teaching poetry were given to teachers, 4 of the teachers (80%) agreed to the statement but there was 1 teacher (20%) who doubts about this.

This pedagogy does not restrict children from socializing and interacting freely with other students. This was seen in the observation session when the teacher demonstrated how Mother Goose cared for and fed her children, the students volunteered to put into practice and played Mother Goose and some of them became children of Mother Goose. The role-sharing played by the students shows that the children are in the process of interacting. Seen in this process, there was a child who directly proposed himself to be a Mother Goose even though his friends have an objection if he played as a Mother Goose. This student tried to persuade his friends to approve his wish. This persuading process shows a process of social interaction, how to win a person's heart so that he does not feel awkward with his wishes. Other interaction processes are seen in the free activity session. A child is playing with a yellow playdough to form a swan, but it is difficult to form a goose half. From the corner of the class came 2 students approaching the struggling student, finding out what difficulties their friend experienced and trying to help him make the beak of the goose. As a result, the beaks they make are too short and thick so it gives a funny impression to them. What happened after that is very interesting. They laugh together. Isn't this a wonderful process of social interaction?

Discussion

The first feature of Montessori's Pedagogy observed in this research is class activity. This pedagogy believes that giving activities to students during the learning process in class will result in an improvement to students. The learning process should be based more on student-centered activities rather than teacher-centered activities. The teacher acts as the leader of the class while the students become the owner of the class. The teacher must ensure that activities in the poetry class are filled with activities that make students feel free to do activities supporting their sensory recognition (according to the Montessori's Pedagogy). From the teachers' response to the questionnaire, most teachers (60%) believe that this Montessori pedagogy is suitable to be implemented in class. They agreed that students must be given more portions in class and the teacher should manage or regulate the class to ensure that all students will be active and will express their ideas and opinion accordingly. Based on the teachers' positive respond the researchers did interviews and class observations to confirm their responses. They were very enthusiastic in answering the researchers' questions and in explaining their understanding of the Montessori's pedagogy. They were also very well prepared when practicing this pedagogy in class and their classes were very well managed and running well. The students were also very active during the lesson and enjoyed the class without any psychological pressure.

The teachers who responded "I doubt it" and "I disagree" to the statements seemed difficult to find a specific reason, but tried to explain their choice during the interview and observation sessions. They thought that it was not a good idea to give students more portion of free activities in class because it would make the class very crowded and be very difficult to be controlled. Although they understand that psychologically the children should be encouraged and motivated by giving more activities they love in class, but they thought that the traditional way of teaching

(teacher-centered activities) is still better to apply to this school. The researchers continued to observe the class and found that the teachers who doubted and disagreed with the Montessori's pedagogy were not well prepared before coming to the class and they just distributed the poem to the students, asked them to read, and memorized some words from the poems.

In terms of building a social relationship, most teachers (80%) agreed to Montessori's pedagogy that provided intense interaction between students in class. Only 1 teacher (20%) did not agree, but also did not disagree with the statements. She only doubted the statement to be applied in class. This was proved when the researchers did an interview and continued observing the class. All teachers seemed very well adapted to this Montessori's pedagogy and they could also manage the students well to build more interaction between students during the poetry lesson. The students were very enthusiastic about following their teacher's instructions. They raced each other to come in front of the class when the teacher asked them to. They also tried to find a partner and share their opinion about the poem with their partner. They learned much about understanding and appreciating friends' opinions. This fact is in line with the goal of Montessori's pedagogy and social competence that will be possessed by students when practicing the building of social relationships [15][13][14].

Children's activity while studying poetry with Montessori's pedagogy is widely recorded in the documentation notes. Children touch the flat and textured surfaces, walk above the lines, remember colors, learn word composition, reading, and writing activities that hone their senses. They have learned various things through the Montessori. In English class, they also do 'Montessori'. They may not yet be aware of what they read in the text of poetry or they have not fully understood the poems they have heard, but they are preparing themselves to know more through the exploration process that this pedagogy offers.

Based on the response of the teachers, the researchers divided them into three (3) categories, they are: (1) Highly Implemented Montessori's Pedagogy (HIMP) category of respondents who answered agree with a question or statement submitted. This agreement related to the full implementation of the Montessori's pedagogy in the class that are corresponding to the Montessori's pedagogy of teaching poetry; (2) Moderately Implemented Montessori's Pedagogy (MIMP) category of respondents who answered any doubt about the questions or statements submitted. This choice of doubt to accommodate the teachers' response in the teaching of poetry remains the Montessori's pedagogy without having more knowledge or special training in the teaching of poetry; and (3) Low Implemented Montessori's Pedagogy (LIMM) category of respondents who answered disagree with the proposed questions or statements. This disapproving answer describes the teacher's response whose teaching in English poetry still often uses traditional and teacher-centered pedagogy rather than the Montessori's Pedagogy in teaching young learners. They think that giving students free activities in class will limit the teachers' control and power over students.

Conclusion

The current study concludes that 3 showed a positive perception towards the application of Montessori's pedagogy in the class of English for Children (HIMP). There is still one teacher who has doubts about the positive effects of this pedagogy, but still use this pedagogy in the classroom (MIMP) and there is also one (1) teacher who disagree with the application of this pedagogy and choose to use other pedagogy because they do not see the role of teachers in the Montessori's Pedagogy (Lowly Implemented of Montessori's Pedagogy).

Further research on the use of Montessori's pedagogy in an English poetry class and other literary works for children is still necessary. The teacher's impression in applying this pedagogy should be further investigated. It is recommended for teachers as suggested by [16] that teachers should have early knowledge of the norm of student behavior and historical background before teaching English, the Montessori pedagogy needs to pay attention to this. There are learning devices in this pedagogy that serve to resolve conflicts in the classroom that often occur because of the lack of cultural and historical understanding that teachers have. The pupil's social experience of receiving this pedagogy also needs to be researched. How far this pedagogy gives students social experience in English language learning, and how far an English teaching strategy can guide students to be good people as affirmed by [17] about ELT ought to consolidate moral and ethical values in arranging strategies to move forward learners' involvement and give the wealthier learning environment

Acknowledgements

We thank SDIT Ar Rahmah Makassar-Indonesia for their support of our research at their institution. We also appreciate the support of our friends for the 2019 batch of the English education doctoral program at Universitas Negeri Makassar (UNM)-Indonesia.

References

- [1] S. Garton, F. Copland, and A. Burns, *Investigating Global Practices in Teaching English to Young Learners*. 2011.

- [2] L. Cameron, "Challenges for ELT from the expansion in teaching children," *ELTJ*, vol. 57, no. 2, pp. 105–112, 2003, doi: 10.1093/elt/57.2.105.
- [3] C. T. Linse and N. David, "[Caroline_Linse,_David_Nunan]_Practical_English_La(BookFi).pdf." 2005
- [4] A. S. Lillard, "Rethinking Education: Montessori's Approach," *Curr. Dir. Psychol. Sci.*, vol. 27, no. 6, pp. 395–400, Dec. 2018, doi: 10.1177/0963721418769878.
- [5] O. T. Christensen, "Montessori Identity in Dialogue," *J. Montessori Res.*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 45–56, Nov. 2019, doi: 10.17161/jomr.v5i2.8183.
- [6] L. Cameron, *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*, 1st ed. Cambridge, 2001
- [7] M. Chang, "EFL Teachers' Attitudes toward Communicative Language Teaching in Taiwanese College," 2011
- [8] S. Chang-Kredl and S. Kingsley, "Identity expectations in early childhood teacher education: Pre-service teachers' memories of prior experiences and reasons for entry into the profession," *Teach. Teach. Educ.*, vol. 43, pp. 27–36, 2014, doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2014.05.005.
- [9] A. Murray et al., "Journal of Montessori Research," *Am. Montessori Soc.*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 1–8, 2019, doi: 10.1109/elektro.2018.8398244.
- [10] M. Ishtiaq, "Book Review Creswell, J. W. (2014). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage," *English Lang. Teach.*, vol. 12, no. 5, p. 40, 2019, doi: 10.5539/elt.v12n5p40
- [11] K. E. Brown, "Evaluating the effectiveness of Montessori reading and math instruction for third grade African American students in urban elementary schools," Diss. Abstr. Int. Sect. A Humanit. Soc. Sci., vol. 77, no. 10-A(E), 2017, [Online]. Available: <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=psyh&AN=2016-53062-076&site=ehost-live>.
- [12] M. Tarnogórska, "'Funny' and 'Curious' Verse: The Limerick in Polish Children's Literature," *Bookbird A J. Int. Child. Lit.*, vol. 53, no. 3, pp. 37–45, 2015, doi: 10.1353/bkb.2015.0062.
- [13] S. G. Trost, B. Fees, and D. Dziewaltowski, "Feasibility and Efficacy of a ' Move and Learn ' Physical Activity Curriculum in Preschool Children," pp. 88–103, 2008.
- [14] C. Webster-stratton and M. J. Reid, "Strengthening Social and Emotional Competence in," *Infants Young Child.*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 96–113, 2004.
- [15] M. Montessori, *The Montessori Method*. United States of America: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2004.
- [16] P. Robertson, J. Adamson, and E. Guzman, "The Asian EFL Journal Professional Teaching Articles," 2016. Accessed: Apr. 12, 2020. [Online]. Available: <http://www.elejournals.com>.
- [17] J. H. J. Chung and X. Wei, "Teach effectively or guide wisely? Discussing the application of wisdom approach to language teaching in thai higher education," *Int. J. Lang. Educ.*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 322–333, 2020, doi: 10.26858/ijole.v4i3.15097.