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Teach me All Over Again: Discovering the Challenges on the Path of Teaching English to a Young Learner

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Abstract

In this autoethnographic study, I present the challenges I faced in teaching English to a young learner as an experienced tertiary level English teacher. I collected the data by means of class notes, a personal reflection journal, and voice recordings for eight months. I conducted content analysis for results and gathered the challenges across the themes of literacy skills, parent and school involvement, materials, and young learner characteristics. Depending on the results, I also made some recommendations for teacher education programs to consider in educating pre-service English teachers on teaching English to young learners (TEYL).

Key words: TEYL, challenges, English teacher education

I. Introduction

English is used by billions of people and is now the world's 'operating system' in which a good command is necessary to enhance prospects in life. As a core marker of sustainability in development around the world, it remains to be the *lingua franca* that brings international relations close in any area. Given its importance, those who do not speak the language are put at a disadvantage especially in the economic world, for English is considered to be one main criterion in employability (Robson, 2013). Given these, learning English at an early age is a matter of concern in different contexts, and it is reasonable for individuals to learn this language as early and effectively as possible so that they could enjoy the possible gains in life.

The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) claims that people can acquire a language more easily and effortlessly before a biologically-determined period of time. Though originally connected to the acquisition of the first language, the hypothesis has possible implications for second language researchers, as well. It seems that there is a critical point of time, which is around puberty, and after this time, it could be harder to acquire a second language (Brown, 2000). Different studies, however, show there is indeed no cut-off point to learn a language. They show that when native-like fluency is what is aimed in a second language, it could be better to start learning it at an early age; when communicative competency is the target, the effect of early start is not that much clear (Cameron, 2001). Learning English early seems to have some advantages, yet there are studies indicating the opposite. It is known that young learners develop receptive skills in a foreign language ahead of productive skills and grammatical knowledge (Cameron, 2001).

Teaching children, as Cameron (2001) remarks, is perceived more to be mothering them than actually helping them to develop intellectually. This is why primary level teachers are often provided less training and offered lower pay, and they hold a lower status than other professionals teaching teenagers or adults. However, it indeed requires knowledgeable, skillful, and resourceful teachers aware of how children learn and what tasks and ideas of teaching are necessary to help them learn. The socio-cultural theory of learning by Vygotsky points to the importance of teachers who play an active role in the learning of a child. Vygotsky emphasizes that it is when children interact with others in their environment that they can develop mentally (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996), and it is indeed the social interaction between the child and the teacher and the mediation and scaffolding by the teacher that help the child to learn and become a skillful practitioner of the target language (Pathan, et al., 2018). Teaching children is not a simple task for teachers, and they play a big role in children's learning. In this autoethnographic study, therefore, as an experienced tertiary level English instructor, I intent to share the challenges I personally encountered while teaching a young learner first time, mainly through my reflections. Reflective practices in teaching are quite helpful and necessary for teachers to develop professional competence (Wallace, 1991; Johnson, 2006); by sharing the obstacles I encountered through my reflections, I intent to attract attention the following questions.

1. What are the challenges of teaching a young learner?
2. What could be the implication(s) of these challenges for the education of 'English as a Foreign Language (EFL)' teachers?

In literature, there are studies on the challenges of teaching young learners English. Sanchez (2003), for example, reflects her own experience with young learners and adolescents at a primary and high school, while Cameron (2003) discusses how teaching young learners creates challenges, attracting a particular emphasis on leaners' literacy development. Besides, Mejia (2009) discusses the negative effects of a policy initiative of the time in Colombia on teaching young learners. She highlights that the policy covers all levels of teaching in the country, yet not enough resources are spared for lower grades, and teachers are not allocated enough opportunities to develop professionally. Also, Garton et al. (2011) study policy/syllabus documents around the world and discover teacher pedagogies, perceptions and challenges in teaching young learners, and make recommendations. Similarly, Sulistyowati (2012) shares challenges of teaching youngsters in large classrooms and attracts attention to useful teaching techniques. Additionally, Garton (2014) identifies the challenges of primary school teachers teaching English in South Korea in relation to the implementation of personnel policy and curriculum, methods and materials policy and comes up with implications. In a close scope to the study, Copland et al. (2014) outline the challenges of teaching young learners English from local and global perspectives; they attract attention to teaching speaking and pronunciation, discipline problems, motivating young learners, writing and spelling, teaching grammar, size of the classroom, and differentiation covering differences in young learners' abilities and levels, weak students, learners with difficulties, students' needs, individual differences, and special needs. In another study, Megawati (2015) identifies children's English development, pre-service teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, teacher talk, teaching media, method, materials, and future English instruction as the challenges of Indonesian pre-service primary school teachers and comes up with suggestions for these. Furthermore, Pertiwi et al. (2019) discover an English teacher's challenges with young learners in Indonesia and express that teaching approach, using monotone media, different class sizes, different characteristics of the students, the difficulties of language skills were the major problems; the researchers make suggestions for these challenges.

The present study brings a different perspective to teaching English to young learners. The studies in literature usually tend to reflect the challenges of teaching young learners from the second-hand perspective of pre-service teachers or teachers as another party. In this study, however, the researcher herself is a teacher educator and an English teacher specialized in teaching adults and has considerable amount of hands-on teaching experience. The researcher herself is involved in teaching a young learner first time and shares her first-hand experience while presenting the challenges.

II. Methodology

2.1. Design

This study is an autoethnography. In autoenthnographic studies, the notions of self, culture, and writing come together and help researchers to go into experiences through reflective and reflexive lenses in various social settings (Canagarajah, 2012; Adams et al., 2015). Autoethnographies may not be supported by positivist viewpoints aiming to reflect reality through quantitative tools and numbers. Nevertheless, as case studies which follow the tradition of ethnographic research originated from anthropology, autoenthnographies have the power to reflect the reality from the personal voice and interpretation of the researcher as an insider (Duncan, 2004). The results of this study may not be generalized to other settings, for it looks into one specific case, but the study may still have implications for practitioners engaged in the teaching of young learners in different contexts.

As one type of narrative, autoethnographies include the personal stories of individuals and are written by those who themselves are the subjects in the studies (Creswell, 2013). From the sociocultural perspective of second language teacher education, Johnson (2009) explains that "narratives are epistemologically the most authentic way to understand teaching from the point-view of the researcher … (and) function as a powerful vehicle for structuring human understanding" (p.96). Narratives as teacher reflections (Burton, 2006), help teachers think on a series of events, make interpretations, and bring meaning to their teaching experience (Johnson, 2009). Reflection "assists teachers' lifelong professional development, enabling them to critique teaching and make better informed teaching decisions" (Burton, 2006, p.298). Therefore, thanks to this research, I could reflect on and share my personal experience as a teacher educator, an English teacher, and a researcher who taught a young learner one to one first time after many years in the profession.

To achieve it, I adopt the interpretive framework of social constructivism by means of which researchers "seek understanding of the world in which they live and work and develop subjective meanings of their experiences" (Creswell, 2013, p.24). It is through the social constructivist lenses of my interactions with the child that I present the difficulties of teaching him.

2.2. Context

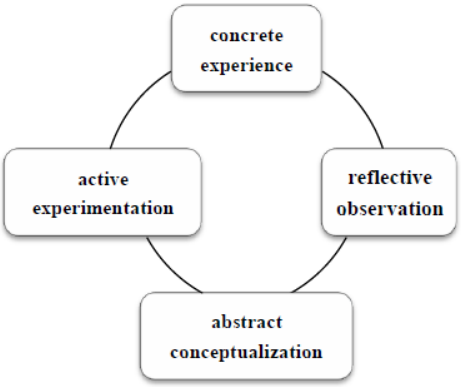
The child in question was a boy at the age of 6 and had been attending an international school for two years of kindergarten by the time I started tutoring him. At kindergarten, he was taught English by native speaker teachers. Some of his classmates had been raised either by native speaker or English-speaking caretakers and had some literacy skills developed. Unlike his friends, this child was born to Turkish parents and had nobody speaking to him in English, except his mother who started speaking to him in English rather late. He developed very little literacy skills in his mother tongue and English. With two years of constant exposure to English at school, the child was able to comprehend speech but could not speak. Neither did he seem willing to speak, for he felt inferior and under pressure due to his relative lack of progress compared to his classmates, as the mother explained. Although he had support classes at school, he needed more support, which was then the family contacted me by the end of June 2019, and we started the sessions in July. In September, the child started the first grade and started developing literacy skills further both in Turkish and English. Meanwhile, the child was assessed at intervals by his school teachers through simple tests on his reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English to check his progress and to decide on the additional support he needed.

In Turkey, English teachers attend four-year education programs after taking university exams. Depending on their exam scores, students are centrally placed into programs and take language, linguistics, literature, educational sciences, and methodology courses and have practicum. Some of these courses focus specifically on teaching English to young learners and materials adaptation and development. At the end of the program, teachers take a centralized exam and are centrally appointed to K12 state schools. Alternatively, they start teaching in private schools or universities (Author, 2019). By the time I started teaching the child, I had already graduated from a prestigious teacher education program at a state university and had ten years of teaching experience. I had taught Turkish to native speakers of English for nine months at a state university in the USA and had been teaching English at a state university in Turkey for nine years. I had several years of experience in materials' adaptation and development and testing as a teacher. I also had received intensive training to become a teacher trainer and had started teaching in a teacher education program.

2.3. Instruments, Data Collection and Analysis

To collect data, I kept class notes, wrote a personal reflective journal, and did voice recordings to keep the incidents after each teaching session with the child, and I took the informed consent of the caretaker parent. Specifically for my reflective practice, I tried to make use of Kolb's (1984, as cited in Kuit et al., 2001) experiential learning cycle. As seen in Figure 1, the cycle consists of four components and is designed considering teaching and student learning in the first place, and it has implications for teachers' reflective practice.

Figure 1. The Experiential Learning Method (Kuit, et al., 2001)



In this method, an experience is chosen by the teacher to reflect, and it is recorded to be analyzed in terms of the thing that happened, the reason why it happened, what the expectation for it was, and what it meant. Then meaning is deduced out of the experience by the person who experienced it and it is experimented in future situations. The cycle keeps being repeated (Kuit et al., 2001).

Between mid-July 2019 and mid-March 2020, I taught the child. Over an eight-month period, I tutored him for 90 minutes each session and had two sessions a week for around six months. Yet, in the last two months, I kept it to a session a week, as the child kept progressing. It was during this time that after each session I kept class notes and wrote a reflective journal and did voice recordings. To analyze the data, I conducted content analysis mainly based on the framework by Huberman and Miles (1994, cited in Creswell, 2013), except frequency count for codes. I looked for the most repeated codes/categories and thematized these codes. Also, peer coding over a certain amount of data was done and thick descriptions were provided as much as possible as validity and reliability check in the study (Dörnyei, 2007). Below are the challenges of teaching a young learner presented.

III. Results and Discussion

3.1. Literary Skills

Teaching the young learner literacy skills in English felt extremely challenging. Until I started tutoring him, the child had been taught to read English words through some basic sounds. However, he did not know a great deal of other sounds to be able to read, and besides, he was unable to differentiate letters from sounds. For some time, I thought hard on how to teach him the English sounds and letters. I eventually decided to move on from what he was familiar with and aimed to build on the sounds he knew. I first tried songs, but the child did not like songs. Then I tried flashcards, on which a letter, a picture, and a word appeared together. From more simple sounds for the child such as /p, b, e, i /, I moved on to more challenging ones such as / ɔ, ʊ, ð, θ / and diphthongs. However, I needed to stop after some time, for the child did not seem to be ready to absorb all. I kept repeating the sounds I presented most of the time, as repetition helped his learning. Meanwhile, however, I realized that I myself had some problems producing some sounds of English, which made it tougher to teach as a non-native speaker teacher of English. Meanwhile, though the child went on learning about sounds, letters remained to be a problem. Whenever he wanted to read the alphabet or decode or spell a word through letters, the sounds came out of his mouth rather than the letters themselves. For instance, he kept uttering the sound /k/ rather than the letter "c" when reading the alphabet. Besides, at school, the child started learning literacy skills in Turkish and English simultaneously, so he seemed to be influenced by his mother tongue, especially while writing in English. For instance, when he tried to write a word in English such as *balloon*, *cat*, or *waterfall*, he would read the word correctly but write *balun*, *ket*, or *wotrfol* similar to Turkish. To deal with these, I searched resources and watched a lot of videos in which native English classroom teachers taught children the sound-letter combinations in English and tried teaching the child these combinations with the strategies of these teachers. In one of the videos, for instance, one teacher taught children the letters and sounds with the example of a cow. She would say a cow had a name and sound. The name of the animal was *cow*, and its sound was *moo.* This teacher taught each letter with its name and sound. I made use of this technique, which worked quite well at some point. Nevertheless, the problem of letter-word match and the influence of Turkish continued, so I always referred back to my life-saver *cow-moo* association both in reading and writing. With all these, it was equally hard for me to show him how to hold a pencil and write on notebook properly by following writing conventions such as indenting, capitalization, fitting letters in-between lines on a continuum, leaving space between words, and using punctuation marks. His hand writing was also quite illegible, which was why we had to write words and sentences together from the very beginning for several times. It was only after constant practice that he started holding the pencil and writing down a little bit better.

As stated before, one challenge was that the child was developing literacy skills in Turkish and English simultaneously, and thus, teaching him reading and writing was not easy, which is in line with Copland et al. (2014). Literacy is a psycholinguistic process of recognizing, encoding and decoding letters, recognizing words, and understanding sentences (Brisk & Harrington, 2000). Learners developing biliteracy know about the symbolic, lexical, structural features of the two languages and use them for different contexts and aims. Bilinguals are believed to attain to two languages in mind, and they could develop literacy skills through one of these languages and apply it to the other if they are gaining literacy in languages simultaneously.

No matter which language they use and how proficient they are, the knowledge of one language may affect the knowledge of the other in bilinguals, and the characteristics of languages could affect and sometimes limit literacy development (Brisk & Harrington, 2000; Cameron, 2001). In a similar vein, reading and writing was not an easy task for the child. He was naturally influenced from Turkish and tended to write English words in Turkish letters and sounds. A similar result is presented by Pertiwi et al. (2019) for young Indonesian English learners who had difficulty in reading and writing and were somehow influenced by Indonesian. It could also be argued that it was equally normal for the child to be confused about English sounds and letters and produce sounds rather than telling letters while spelling or decoding a word or reading the alphabet. As Cameron (2001) and Linse and Nunan (2005) explain, speakers of languages in which there is one-to-one sound letter correspondence might have problems in English, in which a rather less direct grapho-phonemic relationship exists with 44 sounds represented by 26 symbols. Therefore, understandably, teaching the child sounds and pronunciation of words was a challenge on my part as the teacher, as also reported as a challenge for teachers by Copland et al. (2014). Bai and Yuan (2019) and Levi et al. (2016) stress that nonnative English teachers may feel unconfident in teaching pronunciation mainly due to their inadequate training and status in their social and professional context. I took courses on development of oral skills, linguistics methodology, and teaching English to young learners in my university program. Nevertheless, it appears that what I was trained for was not sufficient enough to put into practice; neither could I bring together my training in these courses and make instructional plans and shape my teaching, which caused me to feel inferior deep down. In fact, it was only when I started teaching the child that I noticed the link between these courses further. Therefore, to preserve the self-perceived efficacy of English teachers in teaching young learners, it is necessary that in teacher education programs, teacher educators make sure that pre-service teachers are trained profoundly in phonology in their programs. As Bai and Yuan (2019) stress, in-preservice (and in-service) education, teachers should be trained in a way in which "…a variety of pedagogical knowledge, approaches and tools about pronunciation teaching are introduced, demonstrated and practiced (p.141.)". Besides, educators should always make constant and direct associations between linguistics and teaching methodology, regarding specifically young learners. They should help pre-service teachers be equipped with proper ways to synthesize and put into practice what they have learned in the program.

In relation to literacy skills development, the child's motor skill development was also a challenge in the way of teaching the young learner in question. Similar to the present study, psychomotor skills were reported as a challenge by Pertiwi et al. (2019). Cameron (2001) states that "skilled writing requires mastery of fine motor skills to form the written shapes and orthographic knowledge of how written symbols are combined to represent words through spelling conventions (p. 125)." Given his age and level of motor skills development, it was also natural for the child to mishold a pencil, write badly, or fall sort of writing conventions.

To cap all stated so far, as Brisk and Harrington (2000) state, developing biliteracy is obviously not an easy task on learners' part at all, especially, when individual and environmental factors, as Cameron (2003) supports, add onto differences in languages, which is why it is necessary for teachers be more cautious in their decisions, teaching and curricular activities so that they would not feel lost and incapable of making easy decisions about their teaching. Therefore, regarding methodology and young learner training, teacher educators should attract special attention to children's literacy and motor skills development and provide preservice teachers with valuable insight so as how to teach these skills while teaching English since effective "literacy learning needs informed and skilled teaching (Cameron, 2001, p.123)".

3.2. Parent and School Involvement

In teaching the young learner, I was bounded to the parent and school teachers on what to teach the child. Since the school was an international school, the program and educational practices were not something I was familiar with. The mother was the bridge between me and the school; she would talk to the school teachers or attend parent meetings, depending on which I was expected to support the child for what he lacked and needed to be successful. At school, teachers did not seem to follow a specific and well-outlined curriculum. Even if they did, I was not knowledgeable about it and was unable to follow because of my limited interaction with school teachers. Thanks to the mother, all I was aware was that the child learnt some content and was assessed at intervals at school to see how much he progressed and how much support he needed. If he was not successful at this school, he might be led to another institution to continue his education.

It automatically created anxiety on the part of the parent and affected whatever I taught and practiced with him. I needed to pay extra attention to what he could be assessed on. I was not informed specifically about the assessment process at school, either, which is why one day it was sounds we worked on; the next day it was numbers. This rather unstable notion of what to teach or practice caused me to feel unclear and restricted about what to teach. At the university I worked, I was used to be given a systematic and well-prepared program in which I could have a say if I needed to, but with the child, I could not develop systematicity and collaboration with school teachers. Neither was I used to be in contact with parents, for I taught adult learners. However well-intended it was, the constant guidance by the parent created some pressure on me, and I started to question the worth of my teaching and my capabilities to make decisions regarding my tutoring. Due to all these, I could not help feeling like a coach whose mission was just to get the child ready for a race or match and make it up to parent and school teachers, who could be demanding on the child and me at some point.

Curriculum is a tool to meet learner needs and lead student learning, and teachers can make valuable contributions to their students' learning with their knowledge and expertise, for they are the ones teaching and closely monitoring their students' needs and progress. Given the role of teachers in learning, it is important that teachers understand, have a say, and be a part of decisions related to curriculum and its development (Alsubaie, 2016; Baş & Şentürk, 2019). Unless teachers believe they play a role and share some responsibility, they may neither adopt nor implement the curriculum in an effective way, which possibly could have diverse effects on students' learning. Besides, if they have doubts on their roles and responsibilities, they may lose satisfaction in their job, for they would feel their opinions are not taken into account, as Baş and Şentürk (2019) point out. Therefore, not having a full control in the decision making process regarding what to teach and practice with the child and being over dependant on the teachers and parent caused me to feel as an outsider with limited influence on her own professional decisions. This dependence mostly seemed to be triggered by the lack of clarity about the curriculum and the washback effect present. Washback is defined as adapting teaching and course content to meet the demands of exams (Taylor, 2005), and it means teaching to test and spearing less time on activities unless they appear in tests (Copland et al., 2014). I felt it necessary to shape my teaching depending on the demands of the school and parent concerned about her child's upcoming assessment. Parents can obviously have positive influences on their children's education and learning (Li et al., 2019). Parental involvement in the learning process may positively affect children's cognitive, social, emotional, and academic progress, and since they know a lot about their children, they could be helpful in this process, Nonetheless, they may feel nervous and fearful that their children will not be able to learn English at an early age and may wear their children out while helping them develop knowledge and skills. At that point, their involvement could also be a curse (Linse & Nunan, 2005). Given, it is important that in teacher education programs, pre-service teachers should be made aware of the possible effects of available or non-available curricula, testing practices, and parental involvement on themselves as a teacher and their teaching. They should be guided about how to cope with these possible effects in their pre-service education.

3.3. Teaching Materials

Another challenge was related to teaching materials. It was not easy to have access, either in-print or online, to available materials appropriate for young learners. I had to contact different young learner teachers and publishing houses for materials and did online search on websites for English teachers. Due to the scarcity, I needed to develop materials myself to teach, which was quite difficult and costly, for I did not have much time for materials preparation and ran out of ideas after a couple of trials. However, I was luckily allowed access to the online learning application and library books which my student was asked to use by the school. The application had a lot of story books for young learners from very basic level to more advanced levels. It allowed its users to listen to and read stories, do some speaking and voice recording, and answer comprehension questions about the content. The comprehension questions came at the end of each story and read aloud by a speaker. They were in the form of a multiple-choice test with five questions in three options. The library books, on the other hand, were mainly authentic books targeting native speaker children of English at older ages than 6. The stories and books included topics on various subjects including weather, seasons, holidays, animals, plants, food, friends, witches and creatures and such and thus were quite appealing for the child. Still, they were not all the time suitable to the level of the child either in language content or length. Specifically words such as *beaver* (C2 in Cambridge Online Dictionary), *cunning* (C2), *announce* (B1), *silly* (B1), *whisper* (B2), *cheer* (B2), *bat* (the stick) (B2), *pond* (C1), *exaggeration* (C1), *ward* (C1), or *chase* (B2) would frequently appear in the stories in the application.

These words and alike were difficult for the child in level, and I had difficulty in coming up with explanation that were easy to understand by the child. The stories in the application also included some comprehension questions for which I felt a child at the age of six was not cognitively or linguistically ready enough to answer. These questions sometimes asked the specific order of events, details about the characters and their relationship, similarities and differences between concepts, the intention of the author or what the author meant, or possible deductions one could make from the content. The child needed constant guiding of the teacher and reference to the stories to get the correct answer which could happen after several trials. The testing nature of these questions in the stories also made the child competitive. He always wanted to answer all the questions correctly. Thus, whenever he answered a question wrong, he would not accept it. Rather than trying to understand why his answer was incorrect according to the story, he would automatically go back to the question and choose a different answer than what he had already chosen to make it correct. Besides, we tended to look at and talk about the pictures of the library books since they were quite difficult for the child in words and structures. It was me who sometimes read loud and acted out these books for the child, which made him extremely happy because he was very interested and curious about the content.

Good-quality materials are known to have an impact on how effective teaching practices are and how well students can learn; this is why they need to be designed well enough to support learners as much as possible (Gonzales & Skarin, 2019). However, it may not be easy to reach good-quality materials all the time, or teachers may have no access to materials and resources at all (Copland et al., 2014). Therefore, teachers may need to adapt or develop materials. In my case, due to time constraints caused by my regular work and my inability to come up with ideas to produce materials after some time, I needed to make use of what was available, which was indeed beyond being satisfactory. The online stories and library books, however useful they were, were somehow cognitively and linguistically difficult for the child. As Hughes (2010) and Hestetraeet (2019) argue, stories can provide contextualized language, present useful chunks and phrases, cater rooms for recycling of words and structures, reflect the real life and culture, and motivate children, and provide scaffolding to learn English. Stories with a good content, organization, and language use quality may be very useful in teaching English, and they may attract learners' interest, motivate them, and reinforce their language development. This is why a critical evaluation of quality in stories and their potential for learning is quite important (Cameron, 2001). Regarding Input Hypothesis, Krashen and Terrell (1998) explain that people can acquire a language through input; however, this input should be comprehensible enough for acquisition to take place. It is the input which is a little above learners' current level that helps them acquire a language. Given this, relating the learning process to the real word outside and making use of materials from the real world could be helpful in the acquisition of a language (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). However, although these real-world authentic materials can prepare learners for real life language learning and use, they may still be difficult for learners and create burden for teachers in different ways (Richards, 2017). In my case, online stories and library books were interesting, motivating and authentic enough, yet they were beyond fulfilling their mission considering the level of suitability and cognitive and linguistic ability of the child. As stated before, the problem was related to the vocabulary items in these materials, which normally should be selected very carefully depending on the age and cognitive readiness of the child (Hestetraeet, 2019). Also, the comprehension questions in the online stories caused the child to be anxious about answering the questions incorrectly, which should not be the case as Linse and Nunan (2005) stress. Considering all, it is noteworthy to state that in teacher education programs, pre-service English teachers should be well-informed about selecting and adapting materials specifically for young learners and sustaining a good balance between level of difficulty and authenticity in materials. They should be provided practical ideas and hands-on experience in a materials design and evaluation course which aims young learners in particular. Besides, they should be given a chance to have their practicum in young learner classes to gain experience in the matter.

3.4. Characteristics of the Young Learner

The final challenge was related to the general characteristics of my young learner. First, the child I tutored was not any different than other young learners whose attention span is quite limited compared to adult learners. This caused me to stop the class in every ten to fifteen minutes either for a glass of water, a piece of chocolate, or one favorite movie or cartoon character the child wanted to show me in his books or on TV. Besides, he was too energetic to sit still and study. He sometimes wanted to sit or lie on the study table or spin on his chair. In addition, as the case with any young learner, it was difficult for the child to learn abstract concepts including the days of the week, months, and seasons, especially when he did not develop any notion of these concepts in the mother tongue either. This is why I kept finding myself struggling to help the child understand what autumn/fall was and it was Tuesday rather than Thursday proceeding Wednesday.

As prone to be forgotten quite quickly, vocabulary for these concepts had to be repeated all the time before any progress could be made. My adult learners needed less repetition than the child, which was why constant recycling was indeed something new to me as a teacher. In addition, it was sometimes hard to motivate the child to study, especially given the burden schooling put on his shoulders. It was after his school hours in the evening that we studied together, and by then, he had already been tired after a school day. Though I could on some days motivate him with a small incentive like a candy, the child on other days would cry not to study and even fall asleep. My motivation tricks of candies, chocolate bars, and promises to let him play tablet games stopped working after some time and transformed into a bargain with the child. At some point, the child was bored of learning, too, and giving him learning tips for effective studying, which would normally work with adult learners, was pointless in my case given his young age. Finally, I felt the child was prone to overattachment. For instance, when I was sick and would not be able to make it to the session, he would cry after me. Other days, he would insist on giving me his extra books, Halloween hat, or cookies as a present, or he would want to have fun with me after class. He would ask me, for instance, to watch his favorite movie, play with his automatic robot, or play online games with him. All these characteristics created a challenge for me as a teacher. As I was not used to being around children, I most of the time had difficulty in managing a young learner and make it up to him to learn. In general, I was a disciplined person and this reflected onto my teaching. As a teacher, in general I was strict about sustaining discipline and flow in my teaching. Yet, I was not all the time successful in this with the child, especially considering his limited attention span and energy driving him to stand up, walk, and even jump around at intervals. Neither did I believe I was successful enough in motivating the child if it were not for rewards. I was normally not a very patient person who could fall to the level of a child and roll around with him on the ground as a game to get him to learn. Thus, I could not always be patient with the child while waiting for him to finish writing words or sentences, teaching abstract concepts, or providing constant repetition of what I had taught. I could not be patient enough, either, while motivating him to study, attracting his attention to what we did, and persuading him to do some extra work and sit still, but not to jump or fly over armchairs or make loud noises for fun to disrupt the class. Neither could I be welcoming enough when he was attached to me outside class.

In line with this study, Pertiwi et al. (2019) attract attention to young learner characteristics as a challenge. As literature points out, it is important that teachers understand the general characteristics of young learners, as this understanding will be directly relevant to their teaching (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). Young learners are known to have very limited attention spans (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990; Harmer, 2007), and since they may not be cognitively ready, they may have difficulty in understanding abstract concepts (Harmer, 2007). Especially learning vocabulary is a matter of process for young learners in which constant recycling is very helpful and makes it easy for children to remember words (Cameron, 2001). Also, different than adult learners, young learners are not motivated for integrative reasons such as understanding speakers from different cultures or instrumental reasons such as finding a job or starting university (Li, Han & Gao, 2019). Though young learners are generally believed to be enthusiastic and curious to learn (Harmer, 2007), they may feel tired, reluctant, and bombarded with educational activities (Linse & Nunan, 2005). They may easily lose their interests unless educational activities are engaging enough (Irawati, 2016); it may be hard to motivate, manage, or discipline them to learn English, as also pointed out to be a challenge by Copland et al. (2014) in line with the results of this study. At that point, young learners may need to be motivated, and rewards in the forms of verbal and nonverbal affirmations, points, stickers, and presents such as candies could be helpful means to motivate these learners (Irawati, 2016). Still, once overused, they could become the formula for the child and lose their motivational effect (Fox, 2001), which was the case in this study. In addition, young learners naturally develop attachment to their teachers as they spend time together (Scarlet, 2015), and this attachment could positively affect the leaner's academic achievement (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Verissimo et. al., 2017). Considering all, it seems that I had difficulty since I was not used to teaching a child who had limited attention span, was not ready enough to make sense of abstract concepts, needed constant repetition to learn, and was somehow weary, unmotivated, and closely attached to me. All these characteristics of young learners that are mentioned above are beyond my experience and different from the characteristics of adult learners. Compared to young learners, adult learners are more disciplined in their learning and capable of abstract thinking, and they have a more clear understanding of their reasons to learn. No matter how bored they are, they can still endure in the learning process, and they are able to keep their motivation with a desire to achieve a goal (Harmer, 2007). They also show a different way of bonding with their teachers. Tomšik and Gatial (2018) stress that there could be a relationship between personality traits of individuals and their tendency to choose a future profession, especially teaching.

Given my general characteristics as a person, it seems that choosing adult learners to teach was a correct decision on my part. Teachers' personality traits may play an important role in educational practices (Jurczack & Jurczack, 2015); therefore, it is important that individuals should consider their personality traits if they plan choosing teaching profession and teaching young learners in particular to be effective in their profession.

IV. Conclusion

The challenges that an experienced tertiary level English teacher and teacher educator faces while teaching English to a young learner are identified in this study across literary skills, parent and school involvement, teaching materials, and young learner characteristics. Given the difficulties, it should be noted that teaching young learners is complex and challenging on the teachers' side and requires specific expertise. As Linse and Nunan (2005) stress, teaching young learners English is an ever-developing area; teachers are educated as English language experts or experts in teaching young learners, and these two may not necessarily be taught together in the same educational institution. Since children, adolescents, and adults have different characteristics and needs, what is expected of teachers professionally will not be necessarily be the same across these groups. Therefore, a track division is recommended for teaching departments. Given the results, it is suggested that teacher education programs could be adapted preferably into an (2+2) model. In the first two years, pre-service teachers could be taught general courses on skills development, methodology, linguistics, literature, and educational sciences; in the last two years, they could specialize on whichever learner group they are willing to teach and take courses targeting that group. They could also have their practicum in relation to the preferred group. They could even be recruited by the government depending on the specific level they have majored in. It could be this way that teachers can work with the learner group that are most likely to be in line with their personal characteristics, training, and preferences and thus be more effective in the profession. If such a division is not practically possible, the number of courses on teaching English to young learners could be increased in programs, as Camlibel-Acar (2016) would support. In line with these suggestions, researchers could conduct perception studies focusing on the possible track division in programs. Additionally, English teachers of young learners should be supported for the aforementioned challenges through in-service training. Besides, as Garton et al. (2011) would agree, there should be more support systems between teachers teaching young learners in national and international level, and materials for young learners should be varied.

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