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An Investigation into The Current Situation of Teaching English to Young Learners in Thai Nguyen Province: Issues relating to Teacher Education, Teaching Techniques, Teaching Materials, and Teaching & Learning Conditions

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Abstract

This study investigated into the current situation of teaching English to primary pupils at six primary schools in Thai Nguyen province. Particularly, this study aimed at finding out the problems/challenges of teaching English to primary pupils in Thai Nguyen province in terms of teacher education, teaching techniques, teaching materials, and teaching & learning conditions. Based on the findings, the researcher would like to recommend some changes in order to improve English teaching quality in primary schools in Thai Nguyen province. In order to reach the aim, this study addressed two following questions: 1) What are the problems/ challenges of teaching English to primary pupils in Thai Nguyen province in terms of teacher education, teaching techniques, teaching materials, and teaching & learning conditions? 2) What should be done to improve the quality of English teaching for pupils at primary schools in Thai Nguyen province? The participants of this study were 18 primary teachers of English at six primary schools in Thai Nguyen province. Questionnaire and observation were used to gather data in this study. The findings indicated that most of the teacher had to face with difficulties in using English language at class, understanding the needs/expectations of the young language learners, choosing teaching materials, and using appropriate teaching techniques. The results also revealed that the teachers should be provided more training courses of teaching English at primary schools with the hope that the quality of English teaching for pupils at primary schools in Thai Nguyen province might be improved. Also, the findings from the study indicated that the authorities in Vietnam in general and particularly in Thai Nguyen province should pay more attention to improve English teaching quality at primary schools. The results of the study gave an implication for providing the teachers with strategies for using teaching techniques and teaching materials.

Keywords: Young language learners, teacher education, teaching techniques

Introduction

Nowadays, as the world has become more and more closely integrated, English plays an important part in international communication. As a result, in non-English-speaking countries, this language has become the official subject in curricula at universities/ colleges, upper secondary schools and lower secondary schools in the past decades. Naturally, it is necessary to teach English to children as early as possible in order to prepare them to face the new era.

In Vietnam, English has been introduced into the primary curriculum as an optional subject from Grade 3 since 1996 (Ministry of Education and Training, 1996). In 2003, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) issued a temporary primary

curriculum of English as a guideline for primary schools (Trinh, 2005). However, according to Hung (2005), in practice, there have been a number of problems, which emerges from the shortage of detailed regulations, lack of primary teachers of English and poor physical conditions of primary schools. Not only the mountainous areas/countrysides but also the cities face with this situation.

In Thai Nguyen province, most primary schools choose English as an optional subject from Grade 3. Yet, from informal interviews with a number of teachers of English at primary schools in Thai Nguyen province, the researcher was aware of a number of problems.

First, because there was a shortage of the number of primary teachers of English, many primary schools had to hire part-time teachers. It is often up to the teachers in those schools to decide how to teach English to primary pupils. It seems that there was no concrete guidance of teaching techniques and supervision from primary schools and the provincial department of education. Second, as most of those teachers are secondary-school teachers, they applied the same teaching techniques as used for adolescents to teach primary pupils. Moreover, they also indicated that they had not been trained to fully understand the characteristics as well as the needs of young language learners; therefore, their techniques of teaching may not be effective for this early age. Besides, there were often about 40 to 50 pupils in one class, which made it difficult for the teachers to manage their classroom. It is obvious that no matter what methods the teacher used, success seemed to be difficult for a teacher who had no training of teaching English to young learners but still had to deal with 40-50 students in one class (Syahrial, 2010). In addition, some teachers stated that they had difficulties in choosing the textbooks. Most of them said that they had to teach without concrete guidance of syllabus, textbooks or methods of teaching.

Although in 2003, in Vietnam, there was the temporary syllabus of teaching English to primary pupils, no education conference was held to evaluate its current situations and results. Therefore, the researcher conducted this study to investigate the current situation of teaching English to young learners in Thai Nguyen province. The study focused mainly on issues relating to teacher education, teaching techniques, teaching materials, and teaching & learning conditions. The researcher hoped that the study might help to find out the challenges & difficulties that the teachers of English at primary schools in Thai Nguyen province had to face with in the process of teaching, and recommended some changes in order to improve the English teaching quality to primary pupils.

The aims of this study were to investigate the current situation of teaching English to primary schools in Thai Nguyen and to recommend some changes in order to improve English teaching quality in primary schools. In order to reach the aim, this study addressed two following questions:

1. What are the problems/ challenges of teaching English to primary pupils in Thai Nguyen province in terms of teacher education, teaching techniques, teaching materials, and teaching & learning conditions?
2. What should be done to improve the quality of English teaching for pupils at primary schools in Thai Nguyen province?

Literature Review

English Language Teaching

As we know, language is a medium for communication among human beings. For many decades, English has become an important international language. Therefore, the Ministries of Education in many countries have decreed that English is one of the compulsory subjects from junior school to university and becomes an inseparable component in the education system. As a result, teaching English as a foreign language/second language is paid much attention to because of its significant role. Apparently, teaching English as a foreign language faces many challenges. The first major problem is lack of English practicing environment. In many countries, it seems that pupils have limited chances to practice English other than their English classes at school. The second basic problem is that many teachers of English may not clearly understand the characteristics as well as the needs of the learners. The understanding and use of appropriate teaching methodology, knowledge and skills of curriculum and material development are also big challenges for many teachers of English. In addition, many teachers are lack of English language proficiency. This fact may seriously affect the process of teaching and learning English in many countries. As discussed above, teaching English as a foreign language is important and challenging. Thus, it is necessary to find out effective ways of teaching English.

Characteristics of young Language Learners

To understand their students better and to be able to reach a successful teaching, teachers must be aware of the characteristics of young language learners (YLL). In a study on “*English language curriculum for Primary schools in Cyprus*” (2005), Pavlou et al. state 6 characteristics of young learners as follows:

Children are able to grasp meaning easily. Children can understand the general meaning conveyed in communication before they can understand individual foreign language words. Thus, their understanding can be enhanced through visual aids, postures, gestures, facial expressions and demonstrations that convey meaning effectively.

Children can creatively use their limited language recourses. Children are capable of using their little knowledge of foreign language so as to successfully communicate their intended message. They can achieve this by recombining what they already know, by using various communication strategies, gestures and facial expressions.

Children have a capacity for indirect learning. Children are not trying to learn phrases; however, they are concentrating on trying to guess right. Before they have finished the repeated guessing, they will have confirmed words and structures they only half knew at the beginning. Guessing is actually indirect learning because the mind is engaged with the task and is not focusing on the language.

Children have an instinct for play and fun. At a very young age, children most probably do not see the need for learning a foreign language. Nevertheless, they have an inherent need for play. Therefore, the need to communicate and the reason to use the foreign language can be created through participation in games and other fun activities. In addition, young language learners (YLL) seem to be more sensitive in terms of emotional needs. Teachers of YLL need to be aware of this characteristic.

Children have a lively imagination. Children’s capacity for fantasy and imagination has a very constructive role to play in the language classroom and provides a powerful stimulus for real language use. Another very important feature

observed among YLL is their curiosity. As also pointed out by Piaget (1959), children are instinctively programmed to learn. They have some sorts of language awareness and readiness. They are good at guessing through events that they experience.

Children have an instinct for interaction and talk. This is one of the most powerful motivators for using language. Like all people, YLL need to use language in order to establish interpersonal relationships. They also love opportunities to talk about themselves and their interests.

The Basic Factors Affecting the Young Learners' Foreign Language Learning

Teachers. The teacher is most vital single factor in the teaching English for young learners of any curriculum area. The teacher is responsible for selecting and organizing the course content and the materials of instruction to create a friendly environment, stimulating and maintaining interest, planning varied activities and giving young learners feeling of achievement and success, which will determine whether learning will take place. It is obvious that teachers are the most important in teaching learning process. Concerning the teaching English to young language learners, the two things may be important for the teachers, that is, *teacher education* and *teaching techniques*.

Teacher Education. It is obvious that not everyone good at English can teach English to young language learners well. At present, in many countries and especially in Vietnam, the students of the English Department and the English Pedagogy Department at many universities/colleges are trained to be teachers of English of secondary schools. It is likely that lack primary teacher education program of English may be difficult for the students-teachers to teach English to young language learners. Wang (2008) points out that the nature of the teacher education program to which teachers are exposed and the background and approach of the trainers are likely to have a significant impact on the ways of teaching English to YLL. As pointed out by Sariscany & Pettigrew (1997), teacher education has a significant impact on the knowledge, skills and beliefs of teachers. It is clear that in order to have effective ways of teaching English to YLL, not only the training program but also the process of teachers' practice must be improved and focused on.

Teaching techniques. As pointed out by Kasbolah (1993), using teaching techniques may help teachers of foreign language to bring the students to the real life situations. In other words, the use of teaching techniques will make the lesson more interesting and effective. Kasbolah states that teaching techniques should be combined with the learning activities which are presented in enjoyable and relaxed situations. He also recommends that games, stories, drama and songs are special techniques in teaching English to YLL because of two major principles as follows: first, those are related to child growth and development; second, those are related to the ways that young language learners learn.

Through games. According to Pavlou et al. (2005), games are effective learning tools for the complete age spectrum of young language learners. Since games are fun for young language learners, games are useful in teaching English to them. They help YLL use the target language without feelings of anxiety. They also help the teacher to create contexts in which the target language is useful and meaningful. There is a wide variety of games, which can be used in the language classroom. Guessing games, singing games, board games and word games are a few examples. In this case, young learners may develop their ability to work in-group, to co-operate and to compete.

Games can be a safe opportunity to practice without fear of ridicule. Due to the competitive nature of many games, they can provide a great sense of accomplishment for many students and their teammates as they watch their progression. It is obvious that games to teach English learners can help to make language learning a positive and exciting experience, which will be important and motivating to the students. If the teachers keep students motivated and engaged in the lesson, the results can be incredible.

Through stories/story-telling. Bratislava (2008) states that stories are an important source of vocabulary, intonation, grammatical structures, and patterns in real context. Stories help YLL develop not only language and other areas of the curriculum, but they also help develop their positive attitudes. *Story-telling* is a valuable activity for young learners. Story-telling enables young learners to receive input, listen to the narration and notice the intonation and rhythm of the language while, at the same time, picking up the central meaning of the story (Pavlou et al., 2005).

Through drama/ role-plays. *Role-play* activities create opportunities for the YLL to use the language they have learned under simulated real-life conditions. YLL can receive valuable feedback by watching those involved in the role-play and observing their reactions, which can indicate whether they succeeded in communicating their message or not. Moreover, role-plays offer the opportunity for employing, and observing, non-verbal aspects of communication, such as gestures, facial expressions and eye contact.

Through songs. *Songs* are also excellent techniques for foreign language teaching. Songs allow children to practice their pronunciation and intonation in the comfort of a group when they sing chorally. They can also be used for listening activities since they are authentic listening texts of the target language (Pavlou et al., 2005).

Previous studies. In recent years, the issue “teaching English to young learners (TEYL)” has always been in the focus of researchers. As a result, there is a large number of studies of teaching English to pupils at primary schools carried out by many researchers and educators (Allen, 2008; Chen, Z. & Shen, 2010; Syahria, 2010; Lestari, 2003, etc.)

Allen, (2008) conducted an investigation into the current situation of teaching English to young language learners in two primary schools in Tanzania. This study aimed at finding out whether or not there were any difficulties that the teachers of English faced to teach English to YLL. She worked with 8 teachers and 113 primary students from 4 different classes. She used interviews and observations for collecting data. The results of this study indicated that most of the teachers had many difficulties in managing the class as well as involving students in the lesson. However, this study has not found out the root causes of the problem concerning the teachers’ methodologies.

Chen, & Shen, (2010) studied the teaching English in primary schools in Beijing. The aim of this study was to investigate which challenges of teaching English to YLL that the teachers had to face. The data were collected from a very large number of 4,221 primary English teachers from 1,202 primary schools in Beijing. Questionnaire was chosen as the basic data collection instrument in the study. The findings showed that teaching English to young learners (TEYL) in Beijing is rather challenging due to shortage of qualified teachers and high quality materials. Yet, because of the large number of the participants as well as the use of only questionnaires, it is difficult for these researchers to have a deep and comprehensive

overview of the real situation of teaching English to primary pupils with regard to teaching methods and teacher perspectives.

In a study of teaching English to young learners of primary schools in Jambi city, Syahria (2010) worked with 10 English teachers from ten different schools. The purpose of the study is to survey the current situation of teaching English to YLL in Jambi city. Interview was chosen as the basic means of gathering data. The findings stated that all teachers have never learned methods of teaching concerning TEYL for primary school children. They also stated that they were trained to become English teacher of secondary school, not to become English teacher for TEYL. Therefore, there is a reason to doubt that this study may not make the generalization of the current situation of teaching English to young learners of primary schools in Jambi city.

In Vietnam, to the best knowledge of this researcher, there have not been any studies of the current situation of teaching English to primary pupils in terms of teacher education, teaching techniques, teaching materials, and teaching & learning conditions whether in the big cities or in the provinces. Therefore, this researcher carried out an investigation into the current situation of teaching English to young learners in Thai Nguyen province with regard to teacher education, teaching techniques, teaching materials, and teaching & learning conditions. Hopefully, this study may contribute to increasing teachers' awareness of teaching English at primary schools at Thai Nguyen province.

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects of this study were all of the teachers of English from six primary schools in Thai Nguyen province including teachers at Doi Can and Trung Vuong primary school in Thai Nguyen city, at Song Cong and Pho Co primary school in Song Cong town and at Luc Ba and Yen Lang primary school in Dai Tu district. The number of the subjects was 18 teachers including both male and female. Their age ranged from 25 to 35. All of them graduated from Thai Nguyen College of Education where they were trained as secondary school teachers of English for 3 years. The reason for this fact is that to date, in Vietnam, there has not been any college or university, which trains primary teachers of English. Ten of the participants used to teach English at Secondary Schools in Thai Nguyen for 5 years. The others have taught English at primary schools at least for one year. The researcher chose teachers of English from the city, the town and the villages with the aim to make a generalization of the current situation of teaching English to primary schools in Thai Nguyen province.

Data collection instruments

Questionnaire. In this study, the researcher used a questionnaire containing 11 close-ended questions and 4 open-ended questions. There were 5 personal questions to attain necessary information about the participants such as their age, gender, previous experiences of teaching. To answer the research questions, 10 questions in the questionnaire aimed at investigating information about the teachers' education, their background education, and their challenges of teaching English to young learners (TEYL), the current situation of TEYL in Thai Nguyen province.

Observation. The researcher used observation to collect more in-depth information about the use of language, the teaching techniques to young learners, the teaching materials and classroom management of the primary teachers of English, and

the teaching and learning conditions that teachers of English had to face with. The researcher asked the headmasters of 6 primary schools for permission to attend randomly one English class of the teacher who had the lecture on Monday. The researcher used the classroom observation sheet (see Appendix 2) to observe how and what the teachers teach in 45 minutes. Then, the researcher designed observation evaluation sheet (see Appendix 3) to collect data. Analysis of observed behavior was made and problems were drawn out.

Results and Discussion

Results of Questionnaire

1) *The use of mother tongue in English classes by the teachers*

Table 1 presents the use of mother tongue in English classes as self-evaluated by the teachers.

Table 1

The use of mother tongue in English classes

The use of mother tongue in English classes	N _o of teachers	%
10% - 20%	0	0%
20% - 50%	2	11%
50% - 80%	3	17%
80% - 100%	13	72%

As seen from the table, the majority of the teachers used Vietnamese in English classes. This number accounted for over 70%. It is surprising that only a few of them used English to teach at class. In other words, they underestimated the importance of the use of English as the necessary target language input to YLL. Although some of the purposes for using Vietnamese in English classes can be justified, it seems that the teachers used Vietnamese excessively and this certainly would affect the YLL's acquisition of the new language.

The teachers' purposes of using Vietnamese in English classes were presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2

The purposes of using Vietnamese in English classes

The purposes of using Vietnamese in English classes	%
Clarifying the meaning of new words	89 %
Giving instructions	100 %
Explaining the use of a grammatical point	94 %
Giving feedback	83 %
Giving lectures	44 %
Others	0 %

As can be seen from Table 2, most of the teachers tended to use Vietnamese during the English classes. Although some of the purposes of using Vietnamese in English classes were acceptable, it seemed that the teachers overused the mother tongue, which certainly had an impact on the result of teaching English to young language learners. It is obvious that teachers should create an English-speaking environment by using English more frequently in classes. As stated by Pavlou et al. (2005), children have a capacity for indirect learning. Children are not trying to learn

phrases; however, they are concentrating on trying to guess right. Before they have finished the repeated guessing, they will have confirmed words and structures they only half knew at the beginning. Guessing is actually indirect learning because the mind is engaged with the task and is not focusing on the language. In those cases, teachers may not need to use Vietnamese to soon before the YLL had the opportunity to guess. Only when they could not do it, teachers then may resort to mother tongue.

2) *Techniques of teaching used by primary teachers of English at six primary schools in Thai Nguyen province*

It can be seen clearly from the table that most of the teachers paid little attention to teaching techniques through games, drama/role-plays, stories/story-telling and songs. As mentioned above, young language learners are active, creative and they have an instinct for play and fun. At a very young age, they may be motivated to learn English through games. Moreover, young language learners have a lively imagination. If they are asked to take part in fun activities such as drama/role-plays, stories/story-telling or songs, there may be a powerful stimulus for their real language use. In other words, young language learners are likely to learn English more effectively through these teaching techniques. The use of games, role-plays, stories and songs to teach English to children because of their usefulness has become popular in all language classes in the world. However, it seems that in Vietnam, particularly in Thai Nguyen Province this practice is still something not very well exploited. It is certainly that using these teaching techniques will help young language learners in Vietnam to learn English better.

Table 3

Teaching techniques used by primary teachers of English

Teaching techniques used by primary teachers of English	No of teachers	%
Through games	5	28 %
Through drama/role-plays	7	39 %
Through stories/ story-telling	8	44 %
Through songs	4	22 %
Other teaching techniques	15	83 %

3) *Challenges faced in the process of teaching English*

Table 4 below presents the challenges faced by the teachers in the process of teaching English.

Table 4

Challenges faced in the process of teaching English

Challenges faced in the process of teaching English	Y	N
1. Choosing appropriate teaching techniques to YLL	83%	17%
2. Choosing textbooks/ materials	17%	83%
3. Designing additional activities	22%	78%
4. Managing the classroom	67%	33%
5. Creating an attractive learning environment	67%	33%

As can be seen from this table, most of the teachers faced some challenges in the process of teaching English. In fact, about 83% of them had difficulties in choosing appropriate teaching techniques to young learners. 67% of the teachers found managing their classroom a very challenging task. It is understandable if we could see the fact that their class sometime has more than 50 pupils, and the teaching facilities are still very poor in most of the schools. Similarly, 67% thought it was difficult to create an attractive learning environment. In contrast, they seemed to be better at designing activities and choosing textbooks/materials. It is obvious that creating an attractive learning environment and choosing appropriate teaching techniques play an important part in the process of teaching English. Therefore, in order to achieve the goals of teaching English to young language learners, there must be more specific training programs to help the teachers in those areas they found difficult or challenging.

4) Teachers' self-evaluation of their ability to understand YLL's needs/ expectations

Figure 1 below presents teachers' self-evaluation of their ability to understand YLL's needs/ expectations.

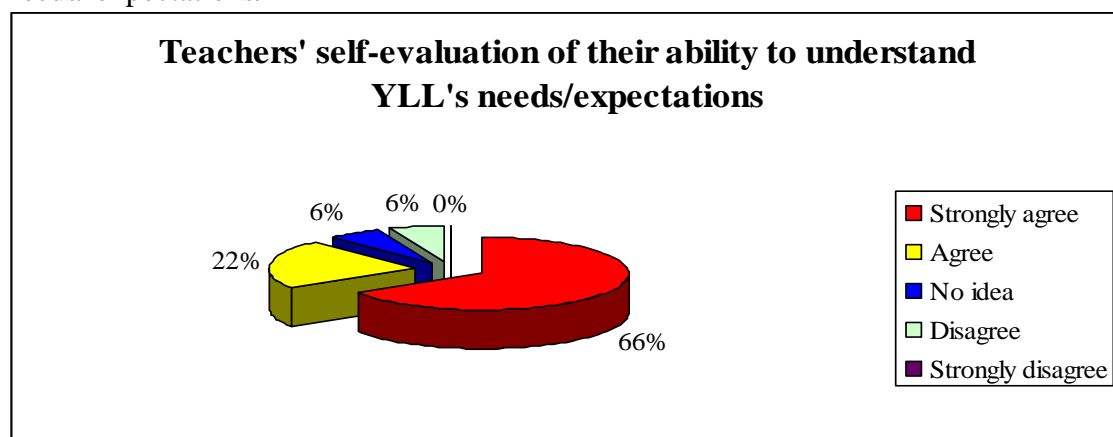


Figure 1. Teachers' self-evaluation of their ability to understand YLL's needs/ expectations

As indicated from the chart, a majority of the teachers (66%) stated that they do not feel confident to understand the needs as well as expectations of young language learners while only 6% of them disagreed with this opinion. It was understandable because all the teachers were not trained as primary school teachers of English and therefore they might find it difficult to understand YLL's psychology. As discussed in Chapter II, young language learners tend to lose interest easily in learning if the lesson is not interesting. In addition, they have no clear reasons for learning English. This also means that children have complex thoughts and emotion; therefore, teachers to YLL should understand those characteristics. There is an obvious need of providing the teachers more training to be able to understand the children's needs and expectations.

Results of classroom observations

1) Teachers' English proficiency

Table 5 shows the ability of using English in class by the teachers. It is clear from the table that a majority of the participants could speak English at an acceptable level in class (66 %) while only 17% of them could use English well. Yet, most of them failed to create an English-speaking environment. It means that although some of them might use English well at class, they had difficulties in creating an environment in which both teachers and students had to use English for communication, thus motivating their students to speak English during the class.

Table 5

Teachers' English proficiency

Criteria	Items	NW	A	W	VW
Language use	1. How well did the teacher use English at class?	17 %	66 %	17 %	0 %
	2. How well did the teacher create an English-speaking environment at class?	83 %	17 %	0 %	0 %

The table also shows that there were a number of teachers whose English proficiency was rated as Not Well. Those teachers made regular mistakes/errors in pronunciation, intonation and they had difficulties of word use. Those teachers do need further training and practice to improve their classroom teaching results.

2) Teaching materials used by the teachers

Table 6

Teaching materials used by teachers

Criteria	Items	NW	A	W	VW
Materials in use	3. How well did the teacher organize the activities based on the textbook to promote communication?	50 %	33 %	17 %	0 %
	4. How well did the teacher use handouts?	33 %	17 %	33 %	17 %
	5. How well did the teacher use visual aids to motivate students?	66%	17 %	17 %	0 %

Table 6 presents teaching materials used by the teachers. As can be seen from the table, most of the teachers did not succeed in organizing the activities based on the textbook to promote communication, using handouts and visual aids to motivate students. This might partly be due to the fact that they had too many pupils in their class, and that the tables and chairs were often arranged in an inconvenient way for organizing such activities. However, there is the reason to believe that some teachers lack the skills and techniques to organize different activities to motivate the students and promote their learning.

3) *Techniques of teaching used by teachers*

Table 7 below shows techniques of teaching used by teachers.

Table 7

Techniques of teaching used by teachers

Criteria	Items	NW	A	W	VW
Teaching techniques	6. How well did the teacher use teaching techniques (such as games/ role-plays/ stories/ songs)?	83 %	17 %	0 %	0 %
	7. How well did the students get involved in tasks through teaching techniques?	83 %	17 %	0 %	0 %

It is surprising that 83 % of the participants did not exploit the effectiveness of teaching techniques such as games, role-plays, stories or songs in the process of teaching. It is obvious that young language learners might learn English better through these teaching techniques because they have a great pleasure for funny activities. It is obvious that children learn by interacting and talking with each other and adults. Senior young learners (age 8-11) in particular can benefit from practicing English with each other. It may be simply playing a game with a partner or practicing simple greetings but being social helps them learn. Children also communicate differently when they are talking to adults and when they are talking to their peers. They can gain many skills by having opportunities to talk with their peers. This finding also indicated that inexperience of using teaching techniques in the process of teaching might be the reason for failure of motivating young language learners.

4) *Teachers' classroom management*

Table 8 below shows the result of the observation of the teachers' classroom management. As shown from the table, most of the teachers seemed to have experience in managing group work or pair work. However, they did not really set up a friendly classroom atmosphere. In most of the classes observed, the pupils seemed to be behaving in a "very good order", meaning that they sat silently on the desks and only answered or participated in an activity when the teacher allowed them to do so. This might be an ideal language classroom where YLL were noisily and happily enjoyed the fun with their peers and the teachers. This fact also shows that it is likely that teachers had difficulty in getting their pupils involved in the lesson.

Table 8

Teachers' classroom management

Criteria	Items	NW	A	W	VW
Classroom management	8. How well did the teacher manage group work/ pair work?	0 %	33 %	50 %	17 %
	9. How well did the teacher establish a friendly classroom atmosphere?	33 %	50 %	17 %	0 %

5) *Teaching & learning conditions at six primary schools in Thai Nguyen province*

Table 9 presents teaching & learning conditions at six primary schools in Thai Nguyen province. It is clear from the table that the conditions of teaching and learning at these primary schools were inadequate and not standard. The overcrowded number of pupils in one class (usually from 40 to 50 pupils) made it difficult for teachers in organizing activities for a group of pupils while controlling what was going on in another corner of the classroom. In addition, there were only limited classroom facilities, which were out-dated. Naturally, it would be too much to hope that such condition can raise the pupils' interest in the lesson. Therefore, the authorities should pay attention to these conditions to make sure that classroom facilities and teaching aids be improved.

Table 9

Teaching & learning conditions at six primary schools in TN province

Criteria	Items	NW	A	W	VW
Teaching and learning conditions	10. How well did the classroom facilities (tables, chairs, board) meet the needs for the process of teaching and learning English?	50 %	33 %	17 %	0 %
	11. How well did the teaching aids (computers, projectors, radios) meet the needs for the process of teaching and learning English?	83 %	17 %	0 %	0 %
	12. How well did the number of pupils meet the standard (about 25-30 pupils each language class)?	100 %	0 %	0 %	0 %

In short, the results from classroom observation were also quite similar to those from questionnaires. Although some of the teachers might use English well at class, they had difficulties in creating an environment in which both teachers and students had to use English for communication. Moreover, most of the teachers did not succeed in organizing the activities based on the textbook to promote communication, using handouts and visual aids to motivate students. In addition, inexperience of using teaching techniques in the process of teaching might be the reason for failure of motivating young language learners. It is likely that teachers had difficulty in getting their pupils involved in the lesson.

Conclusion

The main findings discussed above helped the researcher to give some conclusions to the two research questions in the current study.

The first research question examines what the problems/ challenges of teaching English to primary pupils in Thai Nguyen province in terms of teacher education, teaching techniques, teaching materials, and teaching & learning conditions. First of all, the findings indicated that most of the teacher did not receive appropriate training concerning how to teach English to YLL. This fact resulted in the teachers having to face with many difficulties in using English at class. They were not confident that they could understand the YLL's needs, expectations and

psychology. In particular, they found it difficult to choose teaching materials and additional teaching aids to help making their class more interesting and more motivating to the children. The teachers' lack of training also resulted in their difficulty in using appropriate teaching techniques for their class, especially using games, songs, stories and plays to teach English to young language learners. Secondly, the teachers at the six schools seemed to use Vietnamese excessively in their English class. This practice certainly affected the result and the pupils' achievement in a negative way. Thirdly, there seems to be a lack of guidance and coordination from the part of MOET and TPED concerning the curriculum, the criteria for choosing materials as well as assessment and evaluation of the English teaching program for primary schools.

The second research question concerns what should be done to improve the quality of English teaching for pupils at primary schools in Thai Nguyen province. The results of the study revealed that teachers must be provided with regular training courses of teaching English at primary schools as well as using teaching techniques effectively with the hope that the quality of English teaching for pupils at primary schools in Thai Nguyen province might be improved. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam, the Education Department in Thai Nguyen province and the authorities should pay more attention to provide teachers with adequate guidance of teaching English to primary pupils and well-equipped facilities.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings above, the researcher proposed a number of recommendations as follows. First of all, in term of training courses. The MOET should regularly organize a number of seminars, workshops and other training courses of teaching English so that primary teachers of English at primary schools may improve their professional knowledge. With regard to curriculum. The MOET should give out the same curriculum for teaching English to young language learners at primary schools throughout the nation so that primary teachers of English can be easy to choose teaching materials for their teaching. With reference to teaching and learning conditions. The MOET/ TPED should provide modern teaching facilities for primary schools so that the process of teaching and learning English may be more effective. In addition, the MOET should give the standard for the number of primary pupils in each class to ensure the quality of teaching. Particularly, in this study, the researcher would like to propose teaching techniques, which might be useful and effective for primary teachers of English. Firstly, to meet this demand, the researcher would like to propose "Ten helpful ideas for teaching English to young learners" extracted from Joan (2007) as follows:

1. Supplement activities with visuals, realia, and movement.
2. Involve students in making visuals and realia.
3. Move from activity to activity.
4. Teach in themes.
5. Use stories and contexts familiar to students.
6. Establish classroom routines in English.
7. Use L1 as a resource when necessary
8. Bring in helpers from the community
9. Collaborate with other teachers in your school.
10. Communicate with other TEYL professionals.

Secondly, the researcher recommended that the teachers should use teaching techniques through games, through stories, through drama and through songs. It is undoubted that young language learners are active and creative; therefore, games, stories, drama and songs may be strategic and effective techniques in teaching English to them. Followings are some tips of using games, stories, drama and songs to motivate young language learners.

Teaching through games

Tips on games to teach English learners

First, depending on the size of the class, this may mean that the teacher will have to walk around the room to monitor various groups and assist them during the game as needed (Firstein, 2002). Second, the teacher may decide to act out the game by playing first one part and then the other for them to see. Finally, the teacher should give the game a chance and not be discouraged, as it sometimes takes time for students to understand the game enough to really enjoy playing it.

Teaching through role-plays/ drama

Tips for teaching using role-plays/ drama

For the role play activities in classes, there are six major steps in the procedure.

(*Extracted from Huang, 2008*)

- 1st: Decide on the teaching materials
- 2nd: Select situations and create dialogues
- 3rd: Teach the dialogues for role-plays
- 4th: Have students practice the role-plays
- 5th: Have students modify the situations and dialogues
- 6th: Evaluate and check students' comprehension

Teaching through stories/ story-telling

Stories are a great jumping board for other activities. You can create activities and games based on the theme and vocabulary in the story to give the children more opportunity to practice the language.

Teaching through songs

Music is the universal language, and children respond very strongly to song. It is a fun way for children learning English to increase their vocabulary and pronunciation skills in English.

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