

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides the background of the research which describes the researcher's reason for conducting this research. Then, the statement of the research problem is formulated as well as the objective of the research. It is followed by the significance of the research which informs the benefit of this research.

#### **1.1 Background of the Research**

Language is a tool for thinking and communicating. People communicate to one another in their society, and their thoughts and feelings are expressed by means of language. The need for children to communicate and develop cognitively is based on their learning a language.

In a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected, learning English since early age is critical. English gives students access to more social and educational possibilities because it is a universal language. A strong basis for future academic achievement and global participation can be established by early exposure to English as a Foreign Language (EFL). However, teaching EFL to preschoolers are not without its challenges. Preschoolers have different way of learning than adult learner which requires teaching strategies that are not only engaging and playful but also developmentally appropriate for preschoolers. The strategies must be suitable with the unique characteristics of preschoolers and also supporting meaningful language acquisition.

According to Piaget (1952), preschoolers tend to be in the pre-operational stage, when they start using symbolic thinking but still have difficulty grasping abstract ideas. This suggests that experiential, tangible, and creative learning opportunities are most beneficial for young students. At this time, play-based, visually stimulating, and physically demanding activities are more beneficial for language acquisition than abstract ones.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) emphasizes the importance of social interactions and relationships during the learning process. In the context of the Proximal Development Zone (ZPD), children can achieve greater success if they have access to appropriate support from older or more experienced adults. In the context of EFL, this means that teachers must actively combine meaningful interactions with strategies to assist students progressing in their language learning.

Pestalozzi (1894) believed that children learn best through direct engagement of their five senses: seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting. This aligns closely with the needs of preschool learners, who are in a stage where abstract concepts are difficult to grasp. In the EFL context, applying Pestalozzi's principles means using multisensory strategies such as songs, movement, storytelling, role play, visual aids, and manipulatives to make language learning tangible and meaningful. These activities not only improve vocabulary performance, but they also foster emotional, cognitive, and social skills that are critical for language development.

Taking these theoretical frameworks into account, it is clear that teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) face numerous challenges when teaching English to students. They must develop and implement appropriate strategies for the children cognitive development based on their needs, and fostering motivation and increase interaction. Effective strategies address the desire to learn, socialization, and develop of skills in a safe and supportive environment for preschoolers.

Despite these theoretical based, there is still an important gap in empirical research into how these frameworks are utilized in real-life EFL education for preschoolers, particularly in local context like Muara Bungo. While prior research frequently focuses on early language learning in larger or urban context, little attention has been paid to how preschool EFL teachers in rural or semi-urban areas employ developmentally appropriate strategies and manage challenge in the classroom. There is also a lack of documentation on practical ways for addressing preschoolers' short attention span, emotional needs, and language development pattern. This indicates a gap between theory and practice that requires further research.

To address this gap, an English course institution in Muara Bungo was chosen as the research site because it reflects an example of EFL teaching practices for preschoolers in a semi-urban area with limited resources and teacher training. The institution provides structured EFL learning for children aged 3 to 5, providing a relevant and informative context for researching preschool EFL teaching practices and current challenges in early childhood EFL teaching. In

addition, the consistency in implementing English language learning was a supporting factor that allowed for in-depth observations. By examining this context, this research aims to provide insights into how theoretical EFL frameworks are applied - or not applied - in learning practices in an understudied educational region, such as Muara Bungo.

Therefore, this research sought to explore the challenges faced by preschool EFL teachers and the strategies they use to overcome these challenges in one of the selected English language institutions. Ultimately, this research aims to generate valuable insights that help bridge the gap between theory and practice, contributing to the improvement of early childhood EFL education by examining how these instructional strategies align with the developmental needs of young learners.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The research questions are generated based on the previously stated background problems:

1. What are the challenges faced by the teachers in teaching EFL to preschoolers at one of English institutions in Muara Bungo?
2. What are the strategies used by the teachers in teaching EFL to preschoolers at one of English institutions in Muara Bungo?

## **1.3 Purpose of the Research**

1. To explain the challenges faced by the teachers in teaching EFL to preschoolers at one of English institution placed in Muara Bungo

2. To explain the strategies used by the teachers in teaching EFL to preschoolers at one of English institution placed in Muara Bungo

#### **1.4 Limitation of the Research**

This research focuses on the exploration of challenges faced by teachers and the teaching strategies they use for English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This research was conducted at one of English institution in Muara Bungo, targeting children aged 4-5 years.

This research focuses on the challenges that teachers face when teaching EFL to students in the classroom, related to the preschoolers' characteristics, such as identifying managing short attention span, addressing various levels of language proficiency, and maintaining students' engagement. This research also investigates how teachers use strategies such as play-based learning, the use of songs, and interactive activities to alleviate these challenges and strategies that improve language learning in the classroom.

With a focus on challenges and strategies that they use in specific institution and age groups, the goal of this research is to provide detail insight into the challenges encountered by teachers and effective learning strategies that meet the needs of students.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Research**

There are theoretical and practical benefits to this research that are hoped to be used as additional information. Based on the theoretical benefits the researchers expect that this research will serve as a valuable source of pertinent research to enhance knowledge and information regarding the challenges

encountered and the most effective teaching strategies for preschoolers.

Meanwhile, for practical purposes, English teachers can provide a general overview of the challenges they face when teaching English to their students, especially for young learners. They can also apply strategies that can result in more effective learning process and assist teachers in providing guidance on selecting appropriate teaching strategies, it is hoped that by understanding this strategy, English teachers will be able to make sound decisions on the development of their students. More importantly, by identifying and selecting relevant strategies, the learning process will be more efficient and effective, as well as reducing the need to learn, resulting students who are more engaged and motivated to learn.

## **1.6 Definition of Key Terms**

### **1. Teaching Strategy**

Teaching strategy is more than just a series of classroom techniques, it is a deliberate and planned way that teachers bring their students' learning to life. This strategy encompasses all methods used by teachers to assist students in achieving success. In this research, the learning strategy focuses on how EFL teachers create an engaging and effective way to teach English to preschoolers (Sarode, 2018).

Strategies are essential tools for teachers, from the direct teaching moments when they model and demonstrate language to the magical indirect learning that occurs through play, interactive activity, and hands-on experience. It is also about creating a good environment, from providing a pleasant learning environment to selecting materials that stimulate curiosity and learning.

What makes learning strategies effective in the education of young learners is how flexible and adaptable it is. Each child learns in a unique way, and teachers must adapt their strategies to meet the needs, stages of development, and unique ways of understanding each student (Crain, 2011).

When teaching English to preschoolers, strategies must be tailored to their characteristics, such as listening to interesting songs that make them moving, reading interesting books which contain colorful pictures that captures their imagination, playing interactive games that make learning more enjoyable, and engaging activities. This is about creating a situation in which learning English becomes adventure rather than a chore, while also generating a lot of energy and a lot of interest among young learners (Morrow, 2001).

From the standpoint of the researcher, learning strategies can be viewed as a type of creative problem-solving process in which teachers combine their knowledge of child development, learning materials, and classroom experiences to create enjoyable learning experiences. Learning strategies are more than just static plan; they are dynamic and adapt to the needs and characteristics of the students. Learning strategies, particularly in early childhood education, must not only provide knowledge but also motivate students to learn, motivate teachers to want to learn, and promote social and emotional development in all learning interactions.

## **2. English as Foreign Language for Preschoolers**

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to preschoolers necessitates a unique strategy that takes into account the child's growth and learning needs.

Preschoolers, often between the ages of 4-5 years old, are in a critical period of cognitive and language development, in which they have the ability to learn a new language easily (Diaz & Berk, 2013). Unlike older students who may require more structured instruction, young learners learn English through conversation and interaction rather than formal instruction.

The focus of EFL classrooms is to provide a language-rich environment in which students can learn through games, music, storytelling, and daily activities. This is a more organized and effective than traditional strategies that rely on language rules and formal education (Adolph, 2016). Preschoolers learn best when they are active in their surroundings and can connect new languages with meaningful experiences. Despite the fact that English language instruction is limited in the classroom, effective learning activities can result in significant improvements in students' abilities.

In addition, preschoolers are typically developing their receptive language skills (such as learning and comprehending) before they are able to speak. This is mirror how they learn their first language, which they understand better than what they can express. Understanding this developmental pattern is important for designing EFL programs for preschoolers, as it allows teachers to focus on comprehension activities before expecting verbal production, giving children the time, they need to absorb the language (Lovett et al., 2007).

According to the researcher, learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is a deliberate and systematic process in a setting where English is not the main language of communication in society as a whole. EFL in preschool education



refers to the innovative, intensive, and developmentally appropriate teaching of English to preschoolers. Through connection, meaningful experiences, and regular routines, it encourages spontaneous learning more than formal education. The goal is not just to teach basic language skills, but also to foster a positive attitude toward language acquisition at an early age.

### **3. Young Learners - Preschooler**

Preschoolers, typically aged 4 to 5 years, are in a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid growth in cognitive, emotional, linguistic, and social abilities. According to Piaget (1952), children at this age are normally in the preoperational stage of cognitive development, which is distinguished by symbolic thinking, egocentrism, and the development of imagination. At this time, children benefit the most from hands-on, play-based learning experiences that help them make sense of abstract concepts through physical contact.

According to Xiao et al. (2025), during early life, children construct the underlying architecture for cognitive and language development, and early exposure to rich, dynamic environments dramatically improves learning outcomes. Language development during this stage is particularly remarkable. Diaz and Berk (2013) noted that preschoolers acquire vocabulary at a rapid rate and begin to form grammatical structures. Similarly, Timpe-Laughlin et al. (2024) emphasized that children in this age group benefit significantly from task-based language learning, even in foreign language contexts.

Socially, preschoolers begin to establish peer relationships and engage in cooperative play, although their interactions are often still egocentric (Berk &

Winsler, 1995). Emotionally, they become increasingly capable of recognizing and expressing their feelings, while also developing foundational skills in emotional regulation (Ahmadi & Avarsin, 2024). Physically, their fine and gross motor skills improve, enabling them to participate more actively in manipulative and movement-based learning activities (Failla, & Vetrano, 2024).

According to the researcher, preschoolers are those who have not yet entered the formal level of schooling. At this stage, they possess unique characteristics, marked by well-developing physical abilities, emerging cognitive skills, growing social interactions, and progressing emotional development.