Investigating EFL Kindergarten Teachers' Media and Challenges in Teaching Vocabulary

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ABSTRACT

These qualitative research purposes are to investigate EFL kindergarten teachers' media and challenges in teaching vocabulary. This research design was a qualitative method with a case study approach. The data was collected through interviews and audio-visuals with three participants from private kindergarten schools. The data was analyzed by thematic analysis. The findings revealed that they are similar to the media used by teachers. Most of them used printed properties and technology. Printed and properties are books and flashcards. Technology is software games, educational videos, television computer devices, songs, and games. The results of the study also indicated that the teachers faced some challenges when teaching vocabulary in the classroom, including challenges from students (noisy students, inclusive students, and students' mood), schools/institutions (lack of facility), and teachers themselves (classroom management and teachers' mood).

Keywords: Challenges; EFL Teachers; Media; Vocabulary; Young Learners.

INTRODUCTION

Young learners are at their golden age in learning any subject, especially language. They can understand the language fast when they hear the words. Er (2013) explained that children, who are younger than 11-12 years, have a great possibility of being more fluent in obtaining a foreign language, even like a native speaker without any accent.

English is an international language used by many countries, including Indonesia. It is beneficial to introduce English to young learners. In learning English, vocabulary is the main component that should be taught to children. Purwaningsih & Purwandari (2017) explained that teaching English vocabulary to young learners should not only provide a collection of vocabulary to be memorized because they will feel unpleasant about being forced to memorize the new words. Moreover, Schmitt and Schmitt (2020) argued that teachers should know some principles of teaching vocabulary to young learners, which are different from teaching adults. In other words, teaching English vocabulary to young learners can be different from teaching adults. Young learners should be taught in a group of ways; it could confuse and frustrate them.

In teaching vocabulary to young learners, Wulanjani (2016) explained that teachers should give facilities for learning English vocabulary by teaching useful words and helping children to understand their meaning. In other words, EFL kindergarten teachers should provide appropriate classroom media to attract young learners to their learning. A similar idea was proposed by Fanani and Kusmaharti (2018) in her research. She mentioned that media is one of the effective ways to deliver lesson materials. These indicate that media play a pivotal role in teaching young learners, including teaching vocabulary to them. Since young learners are individuals who like fun activities, therefore, teachers need to have appropriate media when teaching them.

Researchers have widely discussed and documented the study on teaching English to young learners for the last decade. Abrar (2016), for example, explored teachers' problems in teaching English at one of the primary schools in Kuala Tungkal, Jambi. His research found that teachers faced problems teaching young learners, including a lack of motivation, insufficient time and facility, and overcrowded classes. Moreover, Lelawati et al. (2018) investigated the teacher's techniques in teaching vocabulary at one of the primary schools in Soreang. Their findings indicated that teachers applied various techniques in teaching vocabularies, such as flashcards and mimicking. In a more current study, Putri & Lystiani (2020) explored kindergarten teachers' strategies in teaching English vocabulary at one monolingual school in Ambarawa. Their findings suggested that the teachers used various strategies in teaching vocabulary, such as using media (realia, picture, and video); different teaching methods (TPR and storytelling); and learning engagement (cooking class and field trip).

Despite many documented studies on teaching English to young learners, there still needs to be more studies investigating English kindergarten teachers, especially in Jambi. Therefore, this research is expected to fill the gap in the related literature and give new insights into the media and challenges in teaching English vocabulary to kindergarten students.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE
The Concept of Vocabulary

Vocabulary is one of the materials studied by EFL students. It is only possible to be successful in language learning by mastering vocabulary. Vocabulary is generally perceived as the smallest unit of speech that processes individual meanings to speak and interact with one another (Marzuki et.al. 2021). In line with this, Celik & Toptas (2010) and Nasri (2022) asserted that vocabulary refers to a sound that expresses meaning and forms as an independent unit in a language. Furthermore, Ur (20212) claimed that vocabulary meant how a word carries meaning.

Moreover, Hatch and Brown (1995) explained that vocabulary is a list of meaningful words in the target language. These concepts of vocabulary suggest that vocabulary is words to express meaning. Mastery of vocabulary is essential for EFL learners in order to be able to communicate well and understandably.

Media to Teach Vocabulary

Wright (2004) mentions various kinds of media, but visual is appropriate for young learners in learning vocabulary. There are many kinds of media used in teaching vocabulary. The media are described as follows:

a) The picture is a photographic representation of people, places, and things. The picture can translate abstract concepts into realistic or concrete items. Teachers can get colourful pictures from used magazines, posters, brochures, newspapers, and calendars. A picture is simple because it does not require equipment and is inexpensive. Besides, they will last longer and can be used at the beginner level.

b) Realia or real object is the visual instruction media most closely associated with a direct, purposeful learning experience. In education, realia are objects from real life used in classroom instruction. It consists of the objects and items used in the classroom to illustrate and teach vocabulary. The main advantage of using a real object in the class is making the learning experience more memorable for the learners to give simple examples.

c) Puppets are very popular among children. They have been popular for hundreds of years because they are so fun. Some simple puppets are very easy to make. We can make some using things around us.

Aside from Wright (2004), synthesized from several previous studies, we concluded that three common media are used to teach vocabularies, such as pictures, songs, and games. The first common medium of teaching vocabulary is a picture. Based on our review of the related literature, several studies have consistently reported that using pictures in teaching vocabulary was effective. Syafrizal and Haeruddin (2018), for instance, investigated vocabulary teaching strategies in teaching vocabulary to young learners. Their study results proved that the picture is important in the teaching-learning process. Based on the researchers' observation, the teacher used picture(s), e.g., flashcards, to enhance the students' participation in vocabulary class.

Furthermore, Rahmadhani (2015) explored techniques in teaching vocabulary to young learners in one of the English courses and found out that the use of pictures, such as flashcards, was one of the most preferably common techniques in teaching vocabulary. Moreover, a study by Ratminingsih & Budasi (2017) entitled "Local culture-based picture storybooks for teaching English to young learners" found a similar finding; they discovered that Local culture-based picture storybooks have many benefits. The picture motivated students and created a happy and enjoyable learning environment. These show that pictures effectively help teachers to teach vocabulary.

Another common medium of teaching vocabulary to young learners, based on our review of the related literature, is a game. For instance, in their experimental study, Russiana & Nuraenengsih (2016) tried to examine the effectiveness of traditional games in teaching English. Their study results indicated a significant difference between students' English achievement before and after being taught using traditional games. In a different study, Fachriyani & Syafe'I (2018) implemented the Karuta game to teach young learners vocabulary. The result of the study revealed that the game

could help teachers teach vocabulary and a strategy for teachers to know the students' vocabulary mastery—another study conducted by Gruss (2016). The researcher used the game as a tool to teach English, and the study's results revealed that using games helped students understand the lesson. These previous studies indicated that the use of the game is the potential to help teachers to teach English, e.g., vocabulary, to young learners.

The last common strategy teachers use to teach vocabulary is a song. One of the studies was research conducted by Oktaviani (2021), who examined the effect of using the song on young learners' vocabulary achievement. The result showed that the song did have a positive effect on young learners' vocabulary achievement. Similar findings can be found in another research (Sari et al., 2019).

Challenges to Teach Vocabulary

The experts have put forward the definition of the challenges. Burns & Joyce (1997) said that challenges are an interactive process in teaching learning sessions, which includes mistakes and miss understanding. McDevitt and Ormrod (2008) use 'challenge' to indicate a 'level' at which students believe they will succeed if they make a sufficient effort. Another definition was offered by Hornby (2006), a challenge is a new or difficult thing that makes you try hard. It means that teaching is a difficult thing.

Some challenges faced by the teachers to teach young learners. Nunan (2011) said the challenges of teaching young learners are: cognitive development, motivation, attention, multi-level groups, and assessment. These challenges create problems for teachers to teach effectively. Aside from Nunan's point of view, the researcher reviewed several related studies and found three potential challenges teachers face in teaching English (vocabulary) to foreign learners, including young learners. Those challenges are student-related issues, such as (1) students' attitude and students' proficiency (see Abrar, 2016; Brining, 2015; Fahriany et al., 2022; Musarrat, 2011; Widodo & Dewi, 2019), (2) teacher-related issues, such as teachers' professionalism, teachers' proficiency, and teachers' attitude (see Elhamdi & Hezam, 2020; Fahriany et al., 2022; Pertiwi et al., 2020), and (3) institutional issue, such as lack of proper teaching facility (see Abrar, 2016; Widodo & Dewi, 2019).

METHOD

In this study, the researcher investigated EFL kindergarten teachers' media and challenges in teaching vocabulary. The researcher used a qualitative research design. The researcher used qualitative because the researcher was interested in investigating EFL kindergarten teachers' media and challenges in more detail. The researcher used a case study approach. The case study approach is an intensive analysis of an individual, such as a person or community, emphasizing developmental factors concerning the environment. Stake (1995) stated that a case study is expected to get the difficulty of a case; a single leaf, even a single toothpick, has a unique complex study. The researcher used a case study because this research focuses on special interests, and the researcher was looking for detail. In this research, the special interest is EFL kindergarten teachers' media and challenges in teaching vocabulary.

Research Participants

To find the answers to the research, the researcher used the purposive sampling technique in selecting the participants. According to Patton (2002), purposive sampling is the process of identifying and selecting information in qualitative research as the most effective use of a limited source. The researcher wanted to use purposive sampling to make it more effective. Furthermore, purposive sampling allows the researcher to choose participants that are compatible with the purpose of this research (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Creswell, 2013; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The participants of this research were EFL kindergarten teachers in three different private kindergartens in Jambi city. The researcher invited three teachers who are qualified to become participants. It only took three participants because qualitative research focuses more on the in-depth exploration of a case and a phenomenon rather than the quantity or generalizing of the findings. Therefore, the researcher is sure that having three participants could answer the research questions. There were some criteria for participants for this research. First, the participants have been teaching English in the kindergarten minimum of one year. Second, the participants were willing to participate in this research. The researcher initially explored potential participants who matched the criteria; the researcher explained the purpose of the study, the benefit of joining this study, and explained that their data information background would be safe. The participants were willing to participate in this research because they knew the media and challenges, they face in teaching vocabulary since the researcher helped them identify them.

Data Collection

The data was collected through interviews and audio-visual. Below is an explanation of each data collection technique. The researcher chose to use the two techniques. Firstly, the researcher wanted to get a real result from the interview. Secondly, the researcher wanted to use audio-visual to make effective time.

Interview

The interview is one of the data collections used by the researcher. According to Creswell (2012) interview is used when researchers ask some participants or subjects and record their answers to obtain in-depth information about their though, knowledge, motivation, and belief about the topic. In this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews. Blanford (2013) stated that a semi-structured interview is where the questions are already planned. However, the interviewer gives a chance to the interviewee to elaborate and explain a particular issue through open-ended questions. The researcher used a semi-structured interview because it allowed the interviewer to be prepared and develop the question according to interviewee responses.

Audio Visual Method

In this method, the researcher asked the participants to record their classroom situation and sent them to the researcher via a messenger application after their teaching activity has done. The duration for this method was about 7-16 minutes. The researcher asked the participants to record their teaching activities for at least a maximum of three meetings because that was enough to describe what the participants felt. The participants did that their experience in teaching English vocabulary, such as the strategy in the class, what were the challenges they faced in the class and how they handle the challenges. All of the participants sent a full audio-visual to the researcher.

Table 1. The Procedure for Audio-Visual

The Procedure for Audio-Visual
1. Decide visual material that can help answer the research question.
2. Asking the participant to record their teaching activities.
3. Checking the visual material.
4. Collecting the data and managing them.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, researchers used thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) with their six analysis phases. In phase 1, the researchers familiarized the data by listening to the recording, transcribing, and reading the transcription multiple times. After familiarizing the data, the researchers generated initial codes. In generating data, the researchers highlighted the important information or keywords in the transcription. The next step was searching for themes. In this step, the researchers grouped the themes that had been obtained. The next step done by the researchers was reviewing the themes; in this phase, the researchers reviewed the data from the transcription. After reviewing the themes, the researchers defined and labelled the themes. In defining and naming themes, the researchers named the themes found. The last step was producing the report; the researchers started writing the findings and discussion in this phase.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Media Used by Teachers

Based on the data from interviews and audio-visual, the participants have some media to teach kindergarten students vocabulary. Two interrelated themes exist, including printed material and properties and technology-based media).

Related to media, the first theme, "printed material and property," there are three sub-themes found from the data analysis. The first is a book. All teachers acknowledged that they used books, e.g., picture books, in their teaching, which is their primary teaching resource. **Teacher A** said in her interview that she used two different types of books in teaching. She specifically said, *"There are two books; the first is an activity book and a handbook which is specifically for learning. The activity book is specifically for the children's activities"* in a similar vein, **Teacher C** explained that she mostly used books in her teaching. She commented, "*Yes, I quite often used books to vocabulary to teach because it's already there, such as activities, exercises, words, and pictures*." Their responses are that book is central to teaching, especially vocabulary. This is in line with Strouse et al. (2018) that books containing pictures are helpful for learning. They also argued that picture books could be media to transfer information to the real world.

The second subtheme of printed material and property is picture/flashcards. Only two of the three research participants used pictures/flashcards in their teaching. One of them is **Teacher B**. She often taught her students using pictures or flashcards because she found them effective in teaching vocabulary. She conveyed, "*I like using flashcard because it has picture and writing. It also helps the students quickly understand the vocabulary*". Besides **Teacher B**, another teacher, **Teacher C**, often taught her students using pictures/flashcards. The frequent use of pictures or flashcards in teaching vocabulary is no doubt. This finding supports many previous studies highlighting the effectiveness of using this medium to teach vocabulary (See Syafrizal & Haeruddin, 2018; Rahmadhani, 2015).

The last sub-theme of this is a special room. It means a special room provided by the school for the students to learn more focused. This room is completed with the materials preferred by the students. Of the three teachers, only **Teacher A** mentioned this type of media. She stated in her interview, "*We used the special room. The room was completed with audio, props, a computer and a projector in one class. The room is designed especially for English subjects because the students can be more focused and enjoy the learning process.*" It is clear that a special room is simply like a multimedia room

The second theme of media is technology-based media. Based on the data analysis from participants' interviews and audio diary, videos and the use of music were the most common media used by them. Regarding the use of video in teaching, three participants admitted that they used this medium in their teaching. **Teacher A** used video to drill her students' speaking skills. She said in the interview, "*of course, in every meeting, there is a video containing a conversation, and the children have to follow the sentences spoken in the video*." At the same time, **Teacher B** and **Teacher C** used videos to teach the students certain themes, such as greetings, names of animals, or names of fruit. **Teacher C** specifically said in her interview, "*According to the theme, yes, like greeting, I once gave greetings in English videos*. These data suggested that displaying videos when teaching English or vocabulary can effectively teach young learners. This is in line with the results of previous studies which emphasized the effectiveness of video in improving students' vocabulary and speaking skills (Devanti, 2018; Hariyono, 2020).

Aside from the use of video, the use of the song was another prevalent sub-theme. Similar to the use of video, all three participants revealed that they like to use songs to teach vocabulary. They also argued that songs made their classroom more enjoyable. **Teacher A** said in her interview, "I like to use songs to teach animal, number, and another simple vocabulary because it is fun. Besides, *with songs, children can remember a lot and their memory lasts longer if children use songs in learning*". Similarly, **Teacher B** noted in her interview, "*If the songs are the most liked by children. They get it right away and their parents always comment that they are very happy to hear English songs*". **Teacher C** also conveyed a similar idea about using song in teaching vocabulary. She stated, "*It's easy to sing so they stay focused with us and love to sing it and do it every meeting so they unwittingly memorize the vocabulary through singing*." These data clearly showed that the use of songs can be an effective way to teach vocabulary to young learners because it is fun and enjoyable. Besides, it is easily followed by the students without any pressure. This finding is consistent with some findings that the use of songs is effective to teach foreign languages, especially vocabulary (Antika, 2021; Oktavianti, 2021; Sari et al., 2019).

Challenges Faced by Teachers

In terms of challenges, three themes were identified from the data, including student, teacher, and institutional issues. The first theme is a student issue. What it means by the student issue is the challenges from the students. Among the sub-themes identified, a noisy student was found as a prevalent sub-theme. All teachers admitted that noisy students are a distraction from their teaching. **Teacher A** pinpointed in her interview, "*I sometimes really how to handle the students, some of them are active and noisy.*"

Similarly, **Teacher B** noted, "*I find it difficult to deal with noisy students, they are still 4 and 5 years old, urrggg.*" These data showed that noisy students could seriously challenge young learners' teachers to teach effectively in their classes. However, a noisy classroom can become a benefit for teachers. They can create a full-engagement class by doing some activities, such as asking students to tell stories or having group or pair-work activities (Bonnett, n.d).

Another interesting subtheme is an inclusive student(s). One of the teachers, **Teacher A**, explained that she found it difficult to handle special needs students because she had many students to handle in her class. She stated, "*My school accepts all children both normal and inclusive (autism and difficulty to speech/speech delay). I find it hard to manage inclusive students because I have lots of students and limited time to teach English. This sometimes makes the class not effective*". This challenge seems reasonable as she has a big class to handle. Normal and inclusive students can be well-managed if she has a smaller class.

Besides student issue, teacher issue is another prevalent theme in the challenges. From the verbatim data, classroom management was a serious issue for the teachers. ***Teacher B***, for instance, found it hard to manage the class and time because of the limited time provided for her to teach English. She said, "*managing class and time are difficult for me. I only have 30 minutes to teach and, sometimes the children have not finished working on it".* In a different case, **Teacher A** commented in her interview that she sometimes had confusion in managing the class due to her past experience as a Sunday teacher school at church. She stated, "*I sometimes am influenced by how I manage Sunday school at church. I know teaching English here at school and teaching Sunday school is different, but it is just sometimes hard to manage the class*". These data showed that classroom management is a complex issue in teaching young learners. Many factors can influence the way teachers manage the class, such as limited time and access and the influence of past teaching experience. This finding supports the results of Fahriany *et al.* (2022) and Pertiwi *et al.* (2020) that classroom management is a teacher's issue in teaching young learners.

The last theme of challenges is an institutional issue. In this theme, lack of facility was identified as the only sub-theme. Regarding this, two teachers explicitly commented that the teaching facility needed to be improved. **Teacher C** illustrated the difficulty in learning because of the insufficient facility. She commented, "*In our class, there are only chairs. When we have colouring or writing activities, the students have to do the activity on the floor*". With a different story, **Teacher B** explained in her interview that the school has to update the facility that accommodates digital learning. She told the interviewer story of how she requested a set of computers but got rejected. She said *I wanted a solution by presenting tools supporting digital learning. I once proposed a computer for this kindergarten, and it turned out that the school authority said no".* These data indicated that a lack of school facilities could affect teachers' teaching. With the proper facility, they may be able to teach effectively and comfortably. This problem was consistently reported in some previous studies (See Abrar, 2016; Widodo & Dewi, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The result of the research pointed out that English kindergarten teachers still had several challenges in teaching English vocabulary, including the challenges coming from students, schools, and themselves as teachers. According to the data obtained, after finding out the challenges which can hinder the development of students'

vocabulary. The researcher concluded that many media could help EFL kindergarten teachers in helping their teaching classroom activities, such as printed and technology-based media.

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