



Mentoring Program: How it improves teachers' ability to engage pupils in a variety of activities in kindergarten

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Abstract

At the beginning of the learning process, class routines in the form of basic talks, songs and games are one way for kindergarten children to get used to practicing English at a young age and building their self-confidence to communicate with their friends. Thus, the aim of this study was to elaborate the mentoring activity in training teachers on how to incorporate various activities into the classroom routine. Four female teachers of an Islamic private Kindergarten participated in the mentoring program. This is a case study design of qualitative research with classroom observation and interviews. The study revealed that teachers were able to demonstrate some classroom activities through short dialogues, songs and games. It indicated that mentoring activity is found to provide participants with benefits and satisfaction, as well as the potential to motivate them to practice with kindergarten children in classroom.

Keywords: *Child centered learning, Classroom routine, Mentoring, Kindergarten*

INTRODUCTION

At all levels of education, especially from early childhood to high school, class routine activities are an integral aspect of the learning process. Routines, once taught, are day-to-day actions that students can accomplish with little or no assistance from the teacher, achieving two goals: more opportunities for students to learn and more time for teachers to spend to instruction (Colvin & Lazar, 1995). Classroom routines, on the other hand, will vary depending on the teacher's objectives, grade level, and students' abilities to control their conducts (Burden, 2003; Savage, 1999). As a result, the "class routine" in this study is a small talk activity or warm-up activity designed to bridge the gap between students and encourage them to get along well with one another (Fitriani, 2018). This class routine also emphasizes activities that employ English as the primary mode of communication, with the goal of teaching English at a young age. Short talks (small talk) between teachers and students or between students, such as greetings in simple English, can be part of the class routine. For instance, the teacher could begin by asking, "How are you doing?" or "How are you?" What's new in your life? Students responded with phrases such as "fine, wonderful, good, amazing, excellent, great," and others. In addition to short dialogues, the teacher can express short words and perform some easy activities based on the children's age and English proficiency.



Classroom routines give students a sense of security and belonging, both of which are key factors in learning achievement (Paul, 2003). From a cognitive, affective, and psychomotor standpoint, this is a crucial period of a child's development. Social interaction, for example, is crucial in the process of cognitive development. According to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, social learning comes before development, whereas in Jean Piaget's view of child development, development always comes before learning. Vygotsky (1978) states that "Every function in the cultural development of the child emerges twice," "first at the social level, then at the individual level; first, between humans (interpsychological), then within the child (intrapsychological)." In other words, this theory emphasizes the significance of social interaction, particularly from a young age, in order for children to communicate effectively with one another. Because they interact empathically with other children, the development of these two things also increases from a psychomotor perspective. Their psychomotor skills will increase as a result of the games they play in their daily activities. From this theory perspective, implementing class routine activity, which promote children's motivation, communication and social engagement, can accommodate their development.

Early childhood learning differs from that of elementary school and high school students in that the emphasis in early childhood is on playing while learning. Brooker, Blaise, and Edwards (2014) asserted that playing is generally recognized as the foundation for learning in early life. Furthermore, Carty (2018) emphasizes the need of creating routines and regular themes from the beginning of the school year, which aids pupils in becoming better prepared. Thus, kindergarten teachers, in particular, serve a variety of roles, including those of teachers, facilitators, and change agents, all of which necessitate the capacity to educate effectively and with enjoyment using a variety of strategies in order to meet learning objectives (Fitriani & Ilyas, 2021). To improve teachers' capacity and enhance human capital in school, the need of mentoring is a necessity. Barrera (2010) defined mentoring as a long-term relationship in which a senior person (the mentor in terms of age and experience) provides information, advice, and emotional support to a junior person (the mentee). Both sides are known to have a strong emotional commitment in such a relationship (Mullen, 2005). As emphasized by Jyoti and Rani (2019) that mentoring can improve existing human resource strategies such as skill development, information sharing, employee engagement, and teamwork.

Mentoring has always been a crucial aspect of life, especially in academia. Many countries have emphasized the importance of mentoring programs. For example, in order to alleviate the widespread attrition of first-year teachers, mentor programs have been developed in American schools (Croasmun et al., 2000) and have been popular in several English-speaking countries, including the United Kingdom and Scotland (Devos, 2010). Mentoring can be a valuable strategy to facilitate the early career development of academics (Cleary et al., 2017). Mentoring can take several forms in academia, including official and informal mentorship between experienced and less experience faculty members (e.g. Ciuffetelli Parker & McQuirter Scott, 2010; Griffin & Beatty, 2012), experienced and early-career researchers, professors and PhD or undergraduate students, and peer mentoring (Beres & Dixon, 2016). Regardless of their forms, 'Mentoring relationships always share the same basic idea: a more experienced mentor functions as a guide and teachers for a less experienced mentee by giving career related support and guidance,' (Muschallik & Pull, 2016, p. 210). The mentor makes a 'individualized,



personalized effort to assist someone in accomplishing their goals, obtaining their aims, and/or being successful' (Landefeld, 2010, p. 11) through doing so.

This mentorship activity focuses on offering training in class regular activities, particularly in fun English learning for kindergarten children, due to the importance of comprehending class routine activities. The goal of this mentoring is to help teachers understand the numerous activities that take place in the classroom and how important they are in starting to learn and introduce English at a young age. Furthermore, the specific aims are: 1) to improve kindergarten teachers' English abilities; 2) to promote awareness of the concept of child-centered learning and learning patterns for early childhood education; and 3) to execute engaging class routine activities in English. Given the necessity of enhancing human resources in all sectors, including educational institutions, mentorship programs are one way to do so. As a result, this research is crucial to investigate. Under this circumstance, this study focused on the elaboration of the mentoring program in terms of classroom routine, the contribution of class routine activities to children and the teachers' perspective on such program.

METHOD

The four-day online and offline mentorship program intended to assist Kindergarten teachers in improving their basic English language abilities, and teach them a variety of engaging activities in regular classroom activities involving all students. Four female teachers aged from 25 years old to 40 years old from a private Islamic kindergarten took part in online and offline mentorship sessions. It is a small private Islamic school located in Jakarta, which consists of three female teachers and one female principal. Two of them graduated from university and two of them are students from faculty of education and teacher education majoring in early childhood education. The school has 31 students with three classes: Class A, Class B1 and Class B2. Four of them agreed to be a part of the research mentoring program. To protect the privacy of the school and participants, we used pseudonym. We also explained the procedure of the mentoring program beforehand. Activities focusing on comprehending the concept of class routines, pattern of learning, and the introduction of many games and brief talks are carried out via online Zoom meetings.

The first day's events took place in the evening for two hours. Meanwhile, offline activities were repeated three times by directly practicing some gaming activities, short chats, and kindergarten-appropriate children's songs. The face-to-face exercise lasted four hours, which the teachers put what they had learned into practice. We, as mentors, observed these instructors' activity in practicing class routine activities at the third meeting. Data from semi-structured face-to-face interviews with key informants is an important source of case study evidence. Thus, we collected the data from class observation and semi structure interviews to obtain their perspective of mentoring activity. We also took note and videotaped the process of teaching and learning in the classroom. We, then, transcribed the interviews. For data analysis, we reduced, categorized, coded and interpreted the data of observation and interviews.

Here are the procedures of several strategies, which are employed during the activity session, including:



- 1) The first is lecturing technique: This technique seeks to teach basic knowledge about child-centered learning, classroom routines, and learning patterns for children, as well as activities that can be done during class routines. This procedure is carried out via the Zoom meeting platform, which is available online. The concept of child-centered learning is critical because children learn naturally and actively, enjoy activities without being coerced, and are excited about learning. Starting activities with pleasant things like games between individuals or the whole class, and teaching the four abilities, namely speaking, listening, writing, and reading, in an integrated method with a basic pattern while playing, are all very important to comprehend and implement for children.
- 2) The second one is technique of brainstorming and discussion. Brainstorming is a creative and engaging strategy that encourages all participants to participate actively in the learning process. Osborn (1963) coined the term "brainstorming" to describe a creative process for generating a flood of ideas in order to address specific issues. Furthermore, brainstorming is an informal strategy or instrument for group decision-making that generates a great number of different solutions to problems, challenges, and concerns (Schuler, 2014). Participants were asked to come up with fresh and innovative ideas to implement in their classrooms using this technique. Meanwhile, the discussion technique tries to examine a variety of instances of normal activities that can be carried out by teachers with limited English language skills.
- 3) The third technique employed is to demonstrate and practice actions that can be done in the classroom routine. Short and easy talks such as greetings, self-introductions, naming the day, date, and activities carried out are several examples of activities. In terms of kindergarten games, there are alphabetical games, spelling bees, math games, ball games, and a variety of other English games that can be played in groups or as class activities. To improve English pronunciation, short English songs should also be introduced as part of this routine practice. Through games, activities, and entertaining songs, these activities can boost children's brain and psychomotor development as well as facilitate the teaching and understanding of English, especially for children.
- 4) Mentoring is a technique which activities are carried out to aid participants in putting what they've learned into practice. We asked each teacher to rehearse the game or short dialogue that we had demonstrated. The mentors also teach them simple English that they can use in class. We have a number of themes that can be used in the classroom. WhatsApp is also used for additional consultation and help.
- 5) A week after the three days mentoring, we visited the school to observe the classroom activity, which the teachers demonstrated the class routine activity. We made an appointment beforehand, so the teachers could prepare the material.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study show that there are five crucial components in mentoring activities that focus on classroom activities. 1) achievement of mentoring objectives; 2) enthusiasm for participant involvement; 3) participants' achievement in demonstrating



and practicing activities; 4) evaluation results of mentoring activities; and 5) teachers' perspectives on mentoring activities.

1. Accomplishment of mentoring objectives.

The goal of mentoring in terms of the activities and materials offered as a whole was met and delivered in accordance with the implementation timeframe of four days via online and offline. The attendees had a good understanding of the subject delivered on the first day. The mentors requested the participants a series of questions to assess their comprehension of the material. Because there are four mentoring participants, it is also easier and more advantageous for us to teach content, learn about their abilities, and interact more openly.

2. Enthusiasm of participant engagement

The trainees were eager to ask questions and participate in any activity they were offered. We discussed four topics together: 1) how to improve English skills quickly; 2) how to improve correct pronunciation because English pronunciation differs from writing; 3) simple conversation appropriate for kindergarten children; and 4) easy-to-implement games for kids to remember English activities. The passion displayed by the participants in the form of questions is one of the measures of success in this mentoring.

3. The success of the participants in presenting and practicing real-world classroom tasks.

Because the activities took place during the pandemic time of Imposing Level 1 Community Activity Restrictions (PPKM) for DKI Jakarta Province, the implementation was a little more lax, but it still had to adhere to health regulations. As a result, the activity was repeated four times in total, both online and offline. They participated in and be active in a variety of activities as a result of demonstration activities. Overall, they have a good grasp of the topic and are able to follow along with the tasks that are demonstrated directly. The mentor instantly displayed numerous exercises, and they were actively interested in them, particularly on the second day.

Games that are simple to create, such as "math games," in which students can learn basic calculations. Games that are simple to implement, such as "math games" where they can learn simple calculations; "spelling/alphabetical game" where they can correctly pronounce the alphabet; "false and true game," where children are invited to think whether a word is true or false; "guess game," where they guess with the provided pictures, and other games. For songs that are simple to recall and brief, such as "Old Mac Donald had a farm," "Little Indian," "happy song," and other learning-themed songs.

4. Evaluate the mentoring initiatives' outcomes.

The goal of mentoring is to increase their pedagogical competence and professionalism as driving teachers. Evaluation activities are an important part of implementing mentoring to measure the extent to which the themes or topics taught provide benefits to communities in need, and the goal is achieved, namely increasing their pedagogical competence and professionalism as driving teachers.

The evaluation was conducted by direct interviews with teachers and school principals about the mentoring activities that we conducted. They are often pleased with the support because it aids them in comprehending the games and activities conducted in English, despite their language constraints. They do, however, demand more intense training and mentoring, as well as the ability to track and assess their teaching efforts. As we observed the classroom, the teachers could demonstrate the routine activities such



games, short talks and songs that they learned before. The students also seemed enjoyable with the new activities and had fun, even though they had minor mistakes. They could follow the instructions given by the teachers and their faces looked bright as well.

5. Teachers' perspectives on mentoring activities

Asking the perspectives of mentees on the mentoring program is indispensable for the mentors to find out whether the program is beneficial and effective. We interviewed four participants as following:

For me, this program is very beneficial since I lack my English skills. Although my English is very poor, it motivates me to improve my English. Besides that practicing the games what I get from mentoring program, increases my confidence to teach children in an exciting way. The children love playing, singing and having fun at school. So, at least they can do a lot fun while learning something beneficial. At the same time, this program makes me have a lot of ideas to enhance my pedagogical skill and how to vary my teaching technique. (Zahra, 29 years old)

Frankly speaking, I just know all games from this program that I can teach to my students. Especially, math game, the children feel happy when I practice this game. When they are happy, I am happy too as a teacher. It means that my teaching is good because I can make them smile and they practice simple mathematic while playing. It is so fun. (Rossiana, 32 years old)

Even though my English is pretty good for teaching English, sometimes I don't believe in myself, because I'm afraid of being wrong. However, after receiving this assistance, I realized that I only needed to use simple language in instructing the lesson. For sure, I get a lot of benefit from this program. First, I understand more about various game activities that I can do in class in a fun, easy way but using English. Second, I became more confident in using English with children. Third, I have become more creative in varying teaching techniques that are easy for children to grasp in a simple but fun way. (Diva, 25 years old)

As a principal, this program triggers me to do micro teaching more often, so we can learn and share the practice. I am personally very grateful because our school was given the opportunity to get assistance from lecturers who are more experienced and qualified in developing the techniques. Well, it makes me and also other teachers become more creative to vary out teaching techniques. Additionally, it is good to see the teachers more active and the students feel enjoyable learning English. Thus, we can promote our school better that English is taught in our school. (Ukai, 40 years old)

Based on the above data, it can be concluded that mentoring program in the context of class routine activities motivates the teachers to perform better and results in a beneficial knowledge. Furthermore, not only does such program enhance their pedagogical skills and competence, but it also brings more opportunity to practice their English.

Discussion

Mentoring program, which is quite beneficial to kindergarten teachers to teach their students focuses on English skills training and a numerous variety of activities in the classroom routine. Routine activities carried out in English through games familiarize children with foreign languages other than their mother tongue, in addition to introducing



English from an early age. Meetings with English are founded on a strong conviction in learning through play, and that language and culture are shared, as emphasized by Elvin et al (2007) in their project. If class routine activities, which are ritual activities since they are performed every day at the start of the meeting for 10-15 minutes, will develop a school culture. Not only will the activities carried out in class enhance their English language skills, but they will also benefit their interactions, which are a crucial aspect of their social and communicative development. Children learn through social connection and, in turn, actively seek information through engagement with their surroundings, according to sociocultural theory (Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2012; L. Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; L. S. Vygotsky, 2000). Furthermore, children actively seek information through interactions with their surroundings, according to sociocultural theory (Sullivan et al., 2015). These interactions facilitate development in a culturally modified way (Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2012). Interactions between teachers and students, as well as interactions between students that are required in routines, help to build interpersonal communication and social skills, and this is one approach for teachers to assess the quantity and quality of students' skills in this area (Colvin & Lazar, 1995). Thus, regular English-language classroom activities have a good impact on English language abilities, social interaction skills, and communication skills, all of which must be built and nurtured from an early age.

Apart from games, short welcomes, and short songs, Farber (2016) notes that there are eight concepts for establishing class routines and conventions so that the class feels safe, comfortable, joyful, and ready to learn, namely:

- 1) Welcome the children by asking a question when they come in the door.
- 2) Use clapping, bells, singing, or music to create attention-getting signals.
- 3) Use sticks to randomly assign seats and participation to students so that they can get to know one another and form a community.
- 4) Establish a student climate by gradually teaching and modelling practices.
- 5) Introduce the children to this place attempts to foster a sense of community through activities such as student art sharing, labelling, and receiving comments from students on the space. This is done in order to encourage student ownership, community, and comfort.
- 6) Establish classroom standards and procedures, then ask the children to lead the brainstorming session.
- 7) Distinct activities and classrooms may necessitate different standards. For example, reading aloud may necessitate different standards.
- 8) Ask students how they are feeling and what they require in class to reflect and adapt.

The prior results show that learning through games, music, role playing through dialogue, storytelling, cinematic rhymes, and visuals enhanced their vocabulary and improved their pronunciation. Furthermore, youngsters like learning through play. They also learn that there are multiple ways to portray a phenomenon through words, which helps them build a general understanding of language. Last but not least, children appreciate and enjoy playing with and through English (Elvin et al., 2007). It's also crucial to maintain closeness between teachers and students, especially at a young age, so that



they feel at ease and peaceful during the learning process. Morning Meeting Time (MMT), a big group activity that normally takes place in an interactive early childhood classroom that is familiar to instructors and children, is one of the activities carried out in kindergarten (Zhang & Quinn, 2018). This routine MMT is conducted to promote children's writing development which provides meaningful context (Zhang & Quinn, 2018).

Another study found that incorporating a timetable of drawing activities into kindergarten classroom routines increased children's independence while also reducing the need for teacher reinforcement (Watson & DiCarlo, 2016). Brainstorming strategies can also be utilized in regular classroom activities to encourage youngsters to participate and think critically about even the most basic issues or themes. One of the benefits of this method is that it motivates all students to actively participate in the learning process and that it is enjoyable for both students and teachers. (Geuna & Giacobini-Robecchi, 2002). Routine activities, especially at the beginning of the learning process, can be interpreted as providing much-needed benefits to children's cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development, based on the findings of previous research and sociocultural theory that emphasizes social interaction in children's development. Furthermore, the child-centered learning process and learning through games can help children absorb teachings more simply and in an enjoyable way.

In terms of mentoring program, the previous findings identified four C's that are significant to the effectiveness of professional learning: Context: the relationship between individual ends and systemic requisites; Collegiality refers to the importance and positioning of collegial interactions. Criticality: critical consideration in 'safe' learning circumstances and Change: understanding that professional dispositions, pedagogical expertise, and social capital all play a role in teacher learning (Nolan & Molla, 2018). In a study of the effectiveness of mentorship programs, Darling-Hammond (2003) found that beginning teacher retention rates increased as a result. Jokinen, Heikkinen, and Morberg (2012) and Lindberg (2010) highlighted that mentoring is an important part of inducting newly qualified teachers. It helps them make a smooth transition from the classroom to the field of practice. Mentoring also provides opportunity for reciprocal and mutual learning as well as a tool for professional development (Nolan & Molla, 2018).

Given the importance of mentoring program in the teachers' developmental competence and pedagogical skill. Teachers, particularly, in the beginning of years of their professional lives, need supports and improvement either from inside the school or other educational institution so that they can acquire the skills and competence to become high quality and professional teachers for quality education.

CONCLUSION

The study found that mentoring, as one of the ways for developing human resources, enhances participants' abilities both conceptually and practically, increases skills, and fosters involvement between mentors and mentees, as well as improves excellent cooperation. Teachers, as change agents, must maintain their professionalism and improve pedagogical skills through ongoing training and mentoring. However, this study had various limitedness, the first of which is that the mentoring program was only four days long, which obviously did not allow for all of the participants' needs to be met. Second, because class observations were only done once, we were unable to see each



participant's overall progress. The third issue is that this study was conducted with four participants at the kindergarten level, limiting the program's usefulness and findings. Fourth, this program has merely addressed components of classroom practices and language, which will, of course, need time to improve. As a result, more research is needed at all levels of education, from elementary to high school, because long-term mentorship programs are a significant aspect in enhancing the quality of teachers, schools, and education. In addition, this class routine practice should also be carried out for future research to determine the extent of its impact on aspects of children's behavior and motivation in learning, for example.

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