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Teaching English to Young Learners: Insights from Second Language Acquisition Theory

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Abstract

Early childhood is widely recognized as a critical period for language development; however, the implementation of English instruction at this level remains inconsistent, particularly in contexts with limited resources and insufficient teacher preparation. This gap highlights the need for a deeper understanding of how early English education is practiced and its impact on young learners. Therefore, this study aims to examine the importance of introducing English to young learners by exploring its benefits, instructional practices, and associated challenges in early childhood education. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to investigate teaching practices and learner responses in an early childhood education setting. The findings indicate that early exposure to English significantly enhances children's vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and language awareness. Additionally, it contributes to broader developmental aspects, including cognitive growth, memory, and social interaction. The study also reveals that interactive and engaging teaching methods such as Total Physical Response (TPR), songs, storytelling, games, and visual media are highly effective in promoting student engagement and retention. However, several challenges persist, including limited teacher expertise in Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL), inadequate instructional materials, and insufficient parental involvement. These findings imply that the successful implementation of early English instruction requires a comprehensive approach, including continuous teacher professional development, improved access to learning resources, and strengthened collaboration between schools and families. Overall, early English education plays a crucial role in equipping children with essential language and communication skills for future academic success and global participation.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Second Language Acquisition, English Language Teaching, Young Learners, Language Development

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Introduction

Early childhood is widely recognized as a crucial period for development across multiple domains, including cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and social abilities (Koyuncu et al, 2023). During this stage, children's brains exhibit a high degree of plasticity, enabling them to absorb new information more rapidly and naturally compared to older learners (Nguyen & Nguyen,

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2021). Language acquisition is most effective when introduced at a young age because children are more sensitive to linguistic input, possess greater phonological awareness, and are less inhibited when attempting to communicate in a new language (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Koyuncu et al, 2023). This perspective is proposed by the Critical Period Hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021), which suggests that there is a biologically determined window during which language acquisition occurs most naturally and efficiently. These characteristics position early childhood as an optimal stage for introducing a second or foreign language.

From a second language acquisition perspective, Krashen's theory provides a strong foundation for understanding how children acquire language. The Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985; Lucas, 2023) argues that language acquisition is maximized when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly beyond their current level of competence. For young learners, such input is most effective when delivered through meaningful and engaging activities such as songs, games, storytelling, and visual media. In addition, the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021) highlights the importance of a low-anxiety learning environment, which is naturally present in early childhood classrooms where learning is often play-based and interactive. These conditions allow children to acquire language in a more natural and less pressured manner.

In the 21st century, English has emerged as a global lingua franca, playing a dominant role in international communication, education, science, and technology (Crystal, 2003; Butler, 2021). This global significance transforms English from merely an academic subject into an essential life skill. Early exposure to English has been shown to support better pronunciation, intuitive grammar acquisition, and increased language awareness (Brewster et al., 2002; Shin & Crandall, 2022). Therefore, introducing English at an early age is increasingly considered important for preparing children to participate in a globalized world.

Beyond linguistic benefits, early second language learning also contributes to cognitive development. Research suggests that bilingual children often demonstrate stronger executive functions, including attention control and problem-solving skills (Bialystok, 2001; Novitasari, 2024). These findings are consistent with Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and scaffolding in learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Teng, 2024). Through guided interaction with teachers and peers, children can develop language skills within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), thereby enhancing both cognitive and linguistic development. In addition, the principles of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) emphasize the importance of developmentally appropriate, engaging, and meaningful learning experiences (Cameron, 2001; Shin & Grandall, 2022), ensuring that language learning is aligned with children's characteristics and needs.

Despite these well-established theoretical and empirical benefits, the implementation of English instruction in early childhood education particularly in the Indonesian context still faces significant challenges. These include limited numbers of teachers who are adequately trained in both English language teaching and early childhood pedagogy, insufficient teaching materials, and low levels of parental involvement. Previous studies have also highlighted that early English programs often struggle with unclear learning objectives and an overemphasis on rote memorization rather than meaningful communication (Copland, 2020; Teng, 2024). Indonesia, although some early childhood institutions have begun integrating English into their learning activities, the quality and consistency of implementation vary widely. This gap between theoretical recommendations and classroom practice indicates the need for further investigation.

In response to these issues, this study aims to explore the importance of introducing English to young learners in early childhood education by drawing on key perspectives from second language acquisition theory. The study seeks to identify the benefits, effective teaching practices, and challenges associated with early English instruction, particularly within the Indonesian context. It also examines how teachers implement English teaching in classroom settings and how effective these strategies are in supporting children's language acquisition. The research is guided by questions focusing on the benefits of early English learning, effective instructional strategies, and the challenges faced by educators.

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to gain in-depth insights into classroom practices and participant perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Through observations,

interviews, and document analysis, the research captures real-life experiences and contextual factors influencing early English teaching. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both theory and practice, as it provides a clearer understanding of how second language acquisition principles can be effectively applied in early childhood education. Furthermore, the findings are expected to offer practical insights for teachers, parents, and policymakers in improving the quality of English instruction for young learners.

Finally, this paper is structured into several sections. Following this introduction, the methodology section presents the research design and procedures, followed by the findings and discussion. The paper concludes with key conclusions and recommendations for future research and practice.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at exploring and understanding the importance of teaching English to young learners in early childhood education settings (Figure 1). A qualitative approach was selected to gain in-depth insights from educators and to analyze real life practices, perceptions, and instructional strategies implemented in classrooms. This design is particularly appropriate for capturing the complexity of social phenomena and the contextual factors influencing early English language instruction (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Furthermore, qualitative descriptive research enables a comprehensive and straightforward representation of participants' experiences without excessive abstraction (Sandelowski, 2000; Haan, 2026).

Data Sources and Participants

The research was conducted at a bilingual kindergarten and early primary school under the Agape Indah Foundation located in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, where early English instruction is implemented within a developing educational context. The participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they were information-rich and directly involved in English language teaching practices (Patton, 2021). The participants consisted of three early childhood teachers who taught English as part of their instructional modules, two school principals who were actively involved in curriculum planning and teacher professional development, twelve children aged 4–6 years who were observed to examine their language behavior, engagement, and participation, and four parents who provided perspectives regarding home support and attitudes toward early English learning.

Research Instruments

To collect comprehensive and reliable data, multiple instruments were employed, including observation checklists and field notes, semi-structured interview guides, questionnaires, and document analysis frameworks. Observation instruments were used to systematically record classroom activities, teaching techniques, and student engagement. Semi-structured interview guides were designed to explore teachers' and principals' beliefs, instructional approaches, and challenges in teaching English to young learners. Questionnaires and informal interview prompts were used to gather insights from parents regarding their involvement and perceptions of English learning at home. In addition, document analysis was conducted to review lesson plans, teaching materials, and curriculum-related documents, particularly those reflecting how English instruction was integrated into classroom practices. These instruments were developed based on qualitative research principles to ensure flexibility while maintaining consistency in data collection (Creswell, 2021).

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was carried out through a series of classroom observations, interviews, and document reviews. Classroom observations were conducted to examine instructional practices, classroom environments, and children's responses during learning activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and school principals to gain deeper insights into their experiences, strategies, and perceived challenges in implementing early English instruction.

Questionnaires and informal conversations with parents were conducted to understand the extent of home support and parental perceptions. Additionally, relevant documents such as lesson plans, teaching materials, and curriculum guidelines were collected and analyzed to provide contextual understanding of instructional practices. All procedures were conducted ethically, ensuring informed consent and confidentiality of participants.

Measurement and Data Validation

Qualitative research, measurement emphasizes credibility and trustworthiness rather than numerical validity. To ensure the quality of the data, this study applied several validation strategies. Triangulation was conducted by combining multiple data sources, including teachers, parents, and documents, as well as various methods such as observations, interviews, and document analysis. Member checking was applied by returning summaries of findings to participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. In addition, prolonged engagement and persistent observation were undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of the research context. These strategies enhance the credibility and dependability of qualitative findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

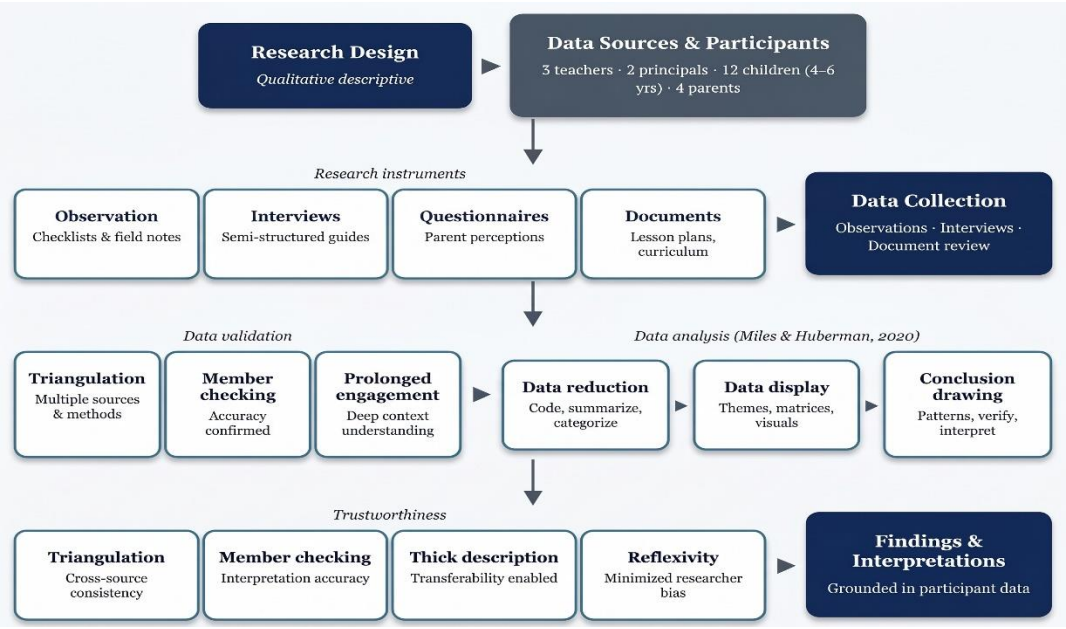
Data Analysis Techniques

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (2020). The analysis process involved data reduction, where the researcher selected, summarized, coded, and categorized field notes and interview transcripts. This was followed by data display, in which the data were organized into thematic representations, matrices, and visual formats to facilitate interpretation. The final stage involved conclusion drawing and verification, where patterns were identified, meanings were interpreted, and findings were validated through continuous comparison and participant confirmation. This iterative analytical process ensured that the conclusions were grounded in the data and accurately reflected participants' perspectives.

Trustworthiness

To ensure overall trustworthiness, this study applied several qualitative rigor strategies. Triangulation strengthened the consistency of findings across different data sources and methods, while member checking ensured the accuracy of interpretations. Thick description was used in reporting the findings to allow for transferability, enabling readers to understand the research context in depth. Furthermore, reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process to minimize researcher bias and ensure that interpretations remained objective and grounded in the data.

Figure 1: Research Methodology Flowchart



The research process begins with the Research Design, where a qualitative descriptive approach was chosen to explore English language teaching in early childhood settings. This design allows for in-depth, contextual understanding of real classroom practices.

From there, the study identifies its Data Sources and Participants through purposive sampling, consisting of 3 teachers, 2 principals, 12 children aged 4-6 years, and 4 parents, all of whom were directly involved in early English instruction at schools under the Agape Indah Foundation in Kupang City, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia.

To collect data, four research instruments were deployed in parallel: observation checklists and field notes, semi-structured interview guides, questionnaires for parents, and document analysis frameworks covering lesson plans and curriculum materials. Data gathered from these instruments were then integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implementation and impact of early English learning within the educational context of the Agape Indah Foundation.

The Data Collection phase integrates all four instruments through classroom observations, interviews with teachers and principals, informal conversations with parents, and review of relevant documents. This multi-method approach ensures comprehensive coverage of the research context. Collected data then undergoes Validation through three simultaneous strategies: triangulation (cross-checking across sources and methods), member checking (returning summaries to participants for confirmation), and prolonged engagement (sustained observation for deeper contextual understanding).

The validated data feeds into Data Analysis following Miles and Huberman's (2021) interactive model, progressing sequentially through three steps, data reduction (coding and categorizing), data display (organizing into themes and visual formats), and conclusion drawing (identifying patterns and verifying interpretations).

To ensure overall rigor, four Trustworthiness strategies run as a final layer: triangulation for consistency, member checking for accuracy, thick description for transferability, and reflexivity to minimize researcher bias. The entire process culminates in Findings & Interpretations that are fully grounded in participant data, reflecting an iterative and ethically conducted qualitative inquiry.

Findings

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of early English instruction in shaping young learners' language development, engagement, and social interaction. The results are presented thematically based on data collected from classroom observations, interviews with teachers and principals, parental input, and document analysis. Each theme is supported by empirical evidence and aligned with relevant theoretical frameworks (Table 1).

The first theme reveals that early exposure to English enhances language acquisition among young learners. Observational data showed that children who were regularly exposed to English during classroom activities demonstrated stronger vocabulary retention and pronunciation skills. For example, during a classroom session, children were able to repeat simple phrases such as "good morning" and "thank you" with accurate intonation after repeated exposure through songs and routines. Teachers also reported that children "quickly imitate words from songs and remember them better than from direct instruction." This finding is consistent with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input and low-anxiety learning environments in facilitating language acquisition (Krashen, 1982; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). The playful and engaging nature of activities such as singing, storytelling, and rhymes created such conditions, enabling natural language acquisition (Cameron, 2001; Shin & Grandall, 2022).

The second theme indicates that curriculum flexibility encourages teacher autonomy but also reveals gaps in implementation. Teachers acknowledged that they had the freedom to design their own English learning modules based on classroom themes and student interests. One teacher stated that "we can adjust English lessons with topics like animals or colours depending on what children like." However, the data also revealed inconsistencies in instructional quality. Teachers without formal training in Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) often relied on online videos or informal teaching methods. This finding aligns with Hapsari (2023), who argues

that flexible or decentralized curricula require strong teacher training and support systems to ensure effective implementation. Without sufficient guidance, flexibility may lead to uneven learning experiences across classrooms.

The third theme highlights the importance of media and teaching aids in increasing student engagement and comprehension. Classroom observations showed that the use of visual and auditory media, such as flashcards, animated videos, songs, and gestures, significantly improved students' attention and participation. For instance, children were more actively involved when teachers used animated videos or physical movements to demonstrate vocabulary such as "jump," "run," or "clap." This finding is consistent with cognitive development theory, which posits that children in the pre-operational stage learn most effectively through concrete and sensory-based experiences (Piaget, 1972; Haan, 2026). Additionally, the use of multimedia tools supports multimodal learning, which enhances retention and understanding (Brewster et al., 2002; Shin & Crandall, 2022). However, data from rural schools indicated limited access to digital tools, which constrained the use of such media and affected the overall learning experience.

The fourth theme focuses on parental support, which was found to be present but inconsistent. Interviews with parents revealed that while they recognized the importance of English for their children's future, many were unsure how to support learning at home. One parent mentioned, "I let my child watch English cartoons, but I don't know how to teach them myself." This indicates a gap between awareness and practical involvement. The reliance on passive exposure, such as watching YouTube, without active reinforcement limits the effectiveness of language learning. This finding is consistent with previous studies highlighting the importance of active parental involvement in supporting language acquisition beyond the classroom setting (Brewster et al., 2002; Shin et al., 2022). The findings also indicate a need for stronger communication and collaboration between schools and families to enhance home-based language learning opportunities.

The fifth theme demonstrates that English learning enhances children's confidence and social interaction. Teachers observed that students became more expressive and willing to participate in classroom activities after repeated exposure to English. For example, children began to volunteer answers, respond to simple questions, and interact with peers using basic English expressions. One teacher noted that "even shy students start speaking when learning is done through games." This finding is consistent with the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which suggests that children develop cognitive and language skills through guided interaction and social engagement (Vygotsky, 1978; Imamah, 2024; Teng, 2024). The non-threatening and enjoyable classroom environment also lowered anxiety, supporting the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of low-anxiety learning environments for effective language acquisition (Krashen, 1982; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021).

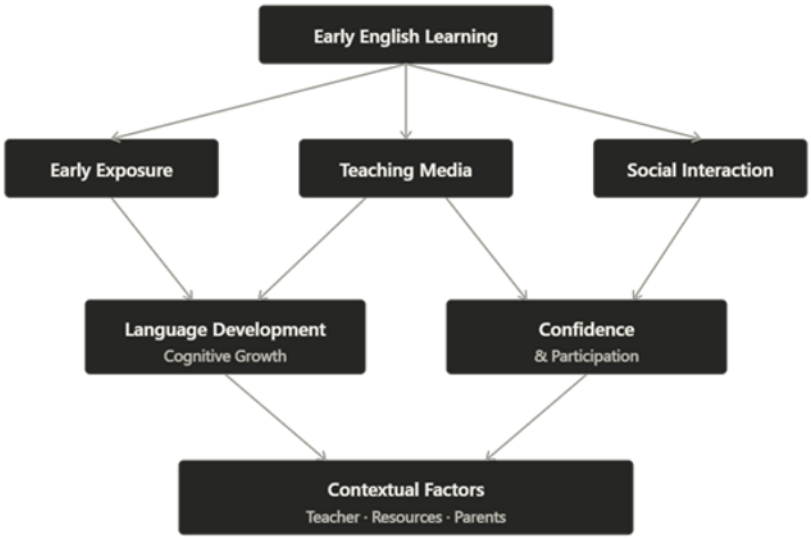
Table 1: Analytical Summary of Key Findings

Theme	**Empirical Findings**	**Theoretical Interpretation**	**Identified Gap / Issue**	**Implication**
Early English Exposure	Children demonstrated improved vocabulary retention, pronunciation mimicry, and participation through repeated exposure (songs, routines, storytelling).	Children demonstrated improved vocabulary retention, pronunciation mimicry, and participation through repeated exposure (songs, routines, storytelling).	Exposure remains limited to classroom; lack of reinforcement outside school.	Need for continuous exposure beyond classroom, especially through home support and structured repetition.

Curriculum Flexibility	Teachers adapted materials based on themes and student interests; autonomy increased creativity.	Aligns with learner-centered approaches and contextual teaching principles.	Lack of standardized guidance and insufficient TEYL training leads to inconsistent quality (Hapsari, 2023).	Professional development and structured guidelines are needed to balance flexibility and quality.
Use of Teaching Media	Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic media increased engagement, comprehension, and participation.	Consistent with Piaget's pre-operational stage and multimodal learning theory (Piaget, 1972; Brewster et al., 2002).	Unequal access to digital tools in rural areas limits effectiveness.	Schools require equitable access to instructional media and infrastructure support.
Parental Involvement	Parents showed positive attitudes but relied mostly on passive exposure (e.g., cartoons, YouTube).	Reinforces role of environment in SLA; input alone insufficient without interaction (Brewster et al., 2002).	Lack of parental knowledge on how to actively support learning at home.	Schools should provide guidance programs for parents to strengthen home-school collaboration.
Confidence & Social Interaction	Students became more expressive, interactive, and willing to participate regardless of grammatical accuracy.	Reflects ZPD and scaffolding through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978; Cameron, 2001).	Language use is still limited to simple expressions; development not yet sustained.	Continuous interactive practice is needed to develop communicative competence further.

The table above provides an analytical overview of the key findings by linking empirical evidence with relevant theoretical frameworks, identified gaps, and practical implications. It demonstrates that while early English exposure, interactive media, and social interaction significantly support language acquisition and learner engagement, several critical issues remain, including uneven teacher competence, limited access to resources, and insufficient parental involvement. These gaps indicate that the effectiveness of early English learning is not solely determined by classroom practices but is also influenced by broader contextual factors such as teacher training (Figure 2), infrastructure, and home support. Therefore, a more integrated approach involving educators, families, and institutional support systems is essential to optimize learning outcomes for young learners.

Figure 2: Model of Factors Influencing Early English Learning



Overall, the findings demonstrate that early English instruction is highly beneficial for young learners, particularly when supported by interactive teaching methods, appropriate media, and a positive learning environment. However, challenges such as inconsistent teacher preparation, limited resources, and insufficient parental involvement remain significant barriers. These findings reinforce the importance of aligning classroom practices with established theories in second language acquisition and educational psychology, while also addressing contextual limitations in implementation.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the widely accepted view that early English language learning plays a crucial role in shaping children's foundational linguistic and communicative competence. From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with second language acquisition (SLA) frameworks, which emphasize that early exposure to language input enhances acquisition outcomes due to children's heightened sensitivity to linguistic input (Cameron, 2001; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Shin & Crandall, 2022; Rahman, 2023). The observed improvements in vocabulary retention, pronunciation mimicry, and classroom participation support the argument that introducing English at an early stage can be beneficial. Furthermore, these results are consistent with the Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of meaningful and comprehensible input in low-anxiety learning environments (Krashen, 1982; Amin, 2023).

However, while these findings support the advantages of early English instruction, it is important to critically consider whether early introduction alone guarantees effective learning outcomes. The data suggests that benefits are highly dependent on the quality of instructional practices and learning conditions. In contexts where teachers lack adequate training or resources, early exposure may result in superficial learning, limited to memorization rather than meaningful communication. This indicates that early English instruction, although potentially beneficial, does not automatically lead to successful language acquisition without appropriate pedagogical support.

In relation to the research questions, the study demonstrates that the benefits of early English learning extend beyond linguistic development to cognitive and social dimensions. Increased confidence, participation, and willingness to communicate reflect the multidimensional impact of early language learning, supporting the principles of Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Lucas, 2023). Through interaction and scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), children develop both language and social competencies. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider that such outcomes may not be equally achieved across different contexts. In less supportive environments, where interaction is limited or teaching methods are less effective, the expected cognitive and social benefits may not fully materialize.

The study also highlights the effectiveness of interactive and engaging teaching methods, such as songs, games, and storytelling, in facilitating language acquisition. These approaches enhance engagement, retention, and comprehension, supporting the principles of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL). From a developmental perspective, multimodal and activity-based learning aligns with children's needs in the pre-operational stage (Piaget, 1972; Novitasari 2024). On the other hand, reliance on such methods also raises questions about sustainability and consistency, particularly in under-resourced settings where access to media and teaching aid is limited. Without adequate support, teachers may struggle to maintain the quality of these interactive approaches.

A critical issue emerging from this study is the inconsistency in instructional quality despite the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum. While flexibility enables teachers to design contextually relevant learning experiences and encourages creativity, it also exposes disparities in teacher competence and resource availability. This finding both supports and challenges previous research. On one hand, it confirms that flexible curricula can promote innovation (Haan et al., 2024); on the other hand, it contradicts the assumption that flexibility inherently leads to effective implementation. The findings suggest that without structured guidance and professional development, flexibility may contribute to uneven learning outcomes rather than improvement.

Similarly, parental involvement presents a complex picture. While parents generally demonstrate positive attitudes toward English learning, their involvement tends to be passive, often limited to providing exposure through media. Although such exposure can support language input, it may not be sufficient for meaningful language development without active interaction. This highlights a gap between awareness and practice, suggesting that parental support, while present, is not yet optimized. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that socio-economic and educational factors may constrain parents' ability to provide more active support.

These findings indicate that the effectiveness of early English instruction is shaped by a combination of pedagogical, contextual, and social factors. Teacher preparedness, access to instructional resources, and parental engagement all play critical roles in determining learning outcomes. Therefore, while early English learning offers clear potential benefits, its success cannot be separated from the broader educational ecosystem in which it is implemented.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. The research was conducted within a limited geographical context and involved a relatively small number of participants, which may restrict the generalizability of the results. In addition, the qualitative approach prioritizes depth of understanding rather than statistical representation. Future research could address these limitations by including larger and more diverse samples or by employing mixed method designs to provide a more comprehensive analysis.

Based on the findings, it can be argued that early English learning is most effective when supported by meaningful input, interactive learning environments, and consistent reinforcement across school and home contexts. However, these elements must be supported by adequate teacher training, structured guidance, and resource availability to ensure their effectiveness. This suggests that early English instruction should be viewed not merely as an early start advantage, but as a system-dependent process requiring coordinated support.

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it contributes to SLA and early childhood education literature by demonstrating that established theories are applicable but context sensitive. Practically, it highlights the need for continuous teacher professional development, clearer instructional guidelines within flexible curricula, and stronger school parent collaboration. In addition, improving access to teaching resources is essential to reduce disparities in learning opportunities.

In conclusion, while early English learning has significant potential to support children's development, its effectiveness depends on how it is implemented. A balanced perspective is therefore necessary, recognizing both its benefits and its limitations, to ensure that early English education leads to meaningful and equitable learning outcomes.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the importance of introducing English to young learners in early childhood education, with particular attention to its benefits, implementation practices, and challenges within the Indonesian context. Drawing on perspectives from second language acquisition (SLA) and early childhood education, the study aimed to examine how early English instruction contributes to children's linguistic, cognitive, and social development, as well as how it is enacted in real classroom settings.

The findings reveal that early exposure to English plays a significant role in enhancing young learners' vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and communicative confidence. Children engaged actively in language learning when instruction was delivered through interactive and play-based approaches such as songs, storytelling, and games. These findings confirm that early English learning not only supports linguistic development but also fosters broader competencies, including creativity, curiosity, and social interaction. Furthermore, the study highlights that a supportive and low-anxiety learning environment contributes substantially to children's willingness to participate and experiment with language.

At the same time, the study identifies important contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of early English instruction. While the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum provides opportunities for teachers to design student-centered and contextually relevant learning experiences, it also leads to inconsistencies in implementation, particularly in settings where teachers lack formal training in Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) or where resources are limited. In addition, although media and technology, such as digital platforms and visual tools, enhance engagement and comprehension, unequal access to these resources remains a significant challenge, especially in rural areas. Parental involvement, although generally positive, tends to be passive due to limited understanding of how to support children's English learning at home.

The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this study reinforces established concepts in SLA, particularly the importance of meaningful input, interaction, and emotional support in facilitating language acquisition among young learners. Practically, it underscores the need for a more integrated approach to early English education, one that involves not only effective classroom practices but also teacher preparation, resource provision, and family engagement. The study contributes to the field by providing empirical insights into how early English instruction is currently implemented and how it can be improved within a developing educational context.

However, this study is not without limitations. The research was conducted within a specific regional context with a limited number of participants, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the qualitative design, while offering in-depth insights, does not allow for broad statistical representation. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable evidence of the potential and challenges of early English learning, highlighting important areas for improvement in both practice and policy.

Considering these findings, several recommendations can be proposed. There is a need for structured and continuous professional development programs to equip early childhood educators with appropriate TEYL methodologies. Curriculum frameworks should be supported with clearer guidelines or sample instructional modules to ensure more consistent implementation. Schools should also strengthen collaboration with parents by providing practical guidance, bilingual materials, and opportunities for engagement in children's learning processes. Furthermore, improving access to teaching media and digital infrastructure, particularly in under-resourced areas, is essential to ensure equitable learning opportunities.

Finally, future research is recommended to explore the long-term impact of early English exposure on learners' academic achievement and language proficiency. Longitudinal studies and broader, mixed-method research designs could provide deeper insights into how early language learning influences educational trajectories over time. Such research would further strengthen the evidence base for policy development and contribute to more effective implementation of early English education.

Ethics approval

Ethical approval for this study was not required as the research involved non-invasive procedures such as classroom observations and interviews. However, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained from teachers, parents, and school authorities prior to data collection. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards.

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Competing interests

The author declares that there are no competing interests.

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Underlying data

Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on request.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Videlindah Ani Sophiandry Haan: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Supervision. Januar Lorenzo Batista Balol: Methodology, Validation, Data curation, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Funding acquisition. Muhammad Arsyad: Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Writing – review & editing, Project administration.

Declaration of artificial intelligence use

Language editing tools (e.g., Grammarly) were used solely to improve grammar, clarity, and readability of the manuscript. All ideas, analyses, and conclusions presented in this study are entirely the author's own work.

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