Joyful English Learning for Young Children: Teacher Training Strategies for PAUD and Kindergarten Educators in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Early exposure to English has become increasingly common among young children due to global trends and the widespread use of the internet, gadgets, and digital media. As a result, even though English is not a compulsory subject in Indonesian kindergartens, many children are already familiar with basic English through online content and everyday media. Therefore, the stigma surrounding early English instruction which is often based on concerns that it may interfere with children's first language development should be reconsidered, as teaching English to young learners can provide valuable preparation for their future. However, many PAUD and kindergarten teachers face challenges in delivering effective English instruction, particularly related to content knowledge, pedagogical strategies, and accurate pronunciation. To address these issues, a community service program was conducted at the Kindergarten and PAUD Laboratory School, Faculty of Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta (FIP UMJ), in Cirendeu, South Tangerang. The program aimed to train PAUD and kindergarten teachers to deliver engaging and effective English lessons for young learners. A total of 11 teachers participated in training sessions that combined lectures, discussions, and teaching practice. The program revealed that many teachers struggle with content knowledge, appropriate teaching strategies, and especially pronunciation that is a critical issue, as young learners often imitate their teachers. Feedback from the participants indicated that more than 75% felt more prepared to teach young learners using the strategies introduced in the program. With these promising results, the program has the potential to serve as a model for English language training for kindergarten and PAUD teachers in Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

English connects people around the world. Although learning English as a foreign language is not formally required in Indonesia's national curriculum for kindergarten and elementary schools(Damayanti

et al., 2023), the demands of globalization increasingly make English proficiency an essential skill (Northrup, 2013; Nunan, 2003). Children generally acquire languages more quickly than adults. Krashen (1985) attributes this advantage to their reliance on implicit learning mechanisms, while Vygotsky, (1978) emphasizes the importance of the rich social contexts in which early language exposure occurs. In Indonesia, where the role of English in early childhood and primary education remains a topic of debate, these perspectives are especially relevant for understanding how young learners develop additional language skills.

Young learners are capable of acquiring multiple languages, particularly when their home language is valued and consistently maintained both at home and in school (Oktavia et al., 2022). Young children benefit significantly from starting English early when the instruction is high quality and their first language receives adequate support (Shani et al., 2024). Research shows that early exposure to English can provide notable cognitive and linguistic benefits, including greater phonological awareness, more accurate pronunciation, and stronger long-term language retention (Lubis et al., 2024). Studies further highlight there is no strong evidence indicating that early English instruction alone harms first language development (Goorhuis-Brouwer & de Bot, 2010; Lucas, 2022). Therefore, the central issue is not whether English should be taught to young learners or not, but rather on the way how teachers teach them so both languages develop successfully.

Children today are also growing up in an environment where English is omnipresent through digital media, the internet, and everyday communication. This constant exposure often leads to passive language acquisition, which, when combined with systematic instruction, can accelerate vocabulary development and comprehension skills. For example, many Indonesian children regularly watch English-language content on platforms such as YouTube, Netflix, or the Disney Channel (Mubarokah et al., 2022). These programs expose young learners to basic vocabulary, expressions, and pronunciation even before any formal instruction begins. Guruh et al., (2024) found that exposure to English-language cartoons has a significant impact on children's English skills, while also emphasizing the importance of environmental support and supervision in managing screen time. Similarly, mobile learning apps such as Duolingo Kids and ABC Kids are becoming increasingly popular among parents who want to supplement their children's early language experiences. In this context, providing early English education is no longer merely an enrichment activity but a necessary response to the reality of children's linguistic environment. When structured lessons build on this incidental exposure, they can foster more meaningful and sustained language development.

Furthermore, early English instruction can create continuity and readiness for learning in later grades. As Gibson et al., (2021) emphasize, a strong foundation established in the early years supports smoother transitions into formal language learning in elementary and secondary education. However, in Indonesia, many early childhood and kindergarten teachers face challenges related to limited English proficiency and pedagogical confidence (Marcellino, 2008). In fact, many English teachers working in kindergarten or PAUD do not have a formal background in English education, and opportunities for in-service professional development are very limited (Mutiah et al., 2020). As a result, teachers often lack the competence and support needed to deliver effective and engaging lessons. This situation limits students of valuable learning opportunities and creates inequities that can negatively impact their future academic outcomes. It also means that primary school teachers may face greater challenges when teaching English to students who have had little prior exposure, and these difficulties can continue into secondary education as well.

Despite growing literature highlighting the benefits of early English exposure and the importance of contextually rich instruction (Romeo et al., 2018; Trilestari et al., 2024), there remains a gap in research and practice related to how Indonesian kindergarten and PAUD teachers can be effectively supported to deliver such instruction. While global and national studies often focus on student outcomes, few studies

address the specific training needs of early childhood educators in low-English proficiency contexts. There is little practical research on programs that help teachers feel more confident and give them clear strategies to teach English in early childhood settings. This is especially important now as more Indonesian parents want their children to learn English from a young age.

In response to this need, it is essential to strengthen teachers' capacity to teach English effectively at an early age. This community service program was developed to train kindergarten and early childhood education (PAUD) teachers to design and deliver engaging, age-appropriate English lessons. By equipping teachers with practical strategies and improving their confidence, the program aims to help children access the benefits of early English learning in a way that is developmentally appropriate, engaging, and sustainable. The community service activity designed with the title Teacher workshop: Building foundational English skills in kindergarten. The workshop instructors are lecturers from Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta and the participants are teachers from Kindergarten and PAUD Labschool FIP UMJ.

METHOD

The community service program was conducted in three main stages over a period of three months.

1. Preparation (October 2024)

Coordination: The team coordinated with school principals and teachers at the Kindergarten and PAUD Lab School FIP UMJ in Cirendeu, South Tangerang. This stage involved needs assessment, scheduling, and agreement on training materials and objectives.

2. Implementation (November 2024)

Workshop: A series of workshops were held to train teachers in the principles and techniques of teaching English to young learners. The workshops combined lectures, discussions, demonstrations, and practice teaching activities. A total of 11 teachers participated in this stage.

3. Evaluation (December 2024)

Feedback: At the conclusion of the program, feedback was collected through questionnaires and informal interviews to evaluate the relevance, usefulness, and effectiveness of the training. Participants also shared suggestions for further improvement and additional support they might need. The community service program timeline is illustrated in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. Timeline Community Service Program Stages

This community service program was implemented through a series of workshops designed to strengthen early childhood teachers' skills and confidence in teaching English to young learners. The training consisted of two sessions, each with a specific focus and set of learning objectives. Each session combined lectures, group discussions, demonstrations, and practice teaching. In the discussion section,

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participants were also encouraged to share their experiences and to reflect on challenges encountered in their own classrooms.

The first session, entitled Engaging and Effective Lessons for Young Learners, provided participants with a comprehensive introduction to both the theoretical foundations and practical applications of early English language teaching. This session focused on the importance of selecting developmentally appropriate methods that consider young children's unique learning characteristics, such as their need for active involvement and enjoyment. Participants explored a variety of strategies designed to make learning English meaningful and accessible, including the use of simple classroom language, interactive activities, and structured routines.

Table 1 outlines the key training components covered in this session. These included an overview of core principles for teaching English to young learners, techniques for using English consistently in classroom communication, and methods for introducing and reinforcing vocabulary through engaging, hands-on experiences. In addition, the session highlighted the role of play and games as powerful tools to maintain motivation and support language retention.

TABLE 1. Training materials on the first session

No.	Material	Duration (JP)
1	Basic Principles of Teaching English to Young Learners	2
2	Using English for Basic Instructions and Classroom Interaction	2
3	Techniques for Introducing and Reinforcing English Vocabulary Through Interactive Activities	3
4	Interactive and Game-Based Teaching Strategies	3

Note. JP = lesson hours

At the beginning of the first session, the instructor introduced the theoretical foundations of teaching English to young learners. It is important for participants to understand that effective English instruction for this age group should be simple, relevant to children's real experiences, personally meaningful, enjoyable, interactive, and delivered in a way that feels easy and positive. Establishing consistent routines was also emphasized as essential for helping students gradually integrate English into their daily activities. Figure 2 illustrates the presentation of these foundational principles during the training.

FIGURE 2. Presentation of foundational principles

After presenting the training material, the instructor guided participants in practicing how to give instructions in English using the three-period lesson strategy. In the first stage, the teacher introduces three objects in sequence, for example: "This is a pencil," "This is a pen," and "This is a ruler." In the second stage, the teacher checks recognition by asking questions such as, "Which one is the pencil?"

Finally, in the third stage, the teacher prompts recall by pointing to an object and asking, "What is this?" Figure 3 shows participants applying this strategy to introduce vocabulary related to classroom objects.

FIGURE 3. Application of the three-period lesson strategy by a participant

The instructor also reminded participants to introduce three basic categories of vocabulary that support learning additional words: colors, numbers, and shapes or sizes. These concepts should be mastered by young learners so they can expand their vocabulary at the sentence level. It is recommended that teachers avoid teaching vocabulary in isolation. Instead, vocabulary should be taught in context so that students can use the basic words to build simple conversations or complete sentences. For example, they might say, "I have two brothers," "I like purple dresses," or "My bedroom is big." Figure 4 shows a participant giving instructions in English to help students become accustomed to hearing English in the classroom.

FIGURE 4. A participant giving English instructions to familiarize students with English

The second session, titled Fun English for Kids, concentrated on practical methods for introducing English in ways that are enjoyable and relevant to young learners' daily experiences. This session emphasized creating a positive and stimulating environment that encourages children to engage confidently with a new language. Participants were introduced to the principles of the Whole Language approach, which integrates listening, speaking, reading, and writing in a natural and meaningful context.

In addition, the training explored a range of child-centered techniques, such as songs, storytelling, role-play, and simple games, all designed to develop familiarity with basic vocabulary and common expressions. Teachers also learned how to incorporate visual aids, manipulatives, and thematic materials to support comprehension and maintain children's interest. The selection of topics and activities reflected

themes closely related to the children's world, including family, daily routines, body parts, colors, and hobbies. Table 2 presents the main training materials and duration of this session.

TABLE 2. Descriptive Statistics Results

No.	Material	Duration (JP)
1	Language Development in Early Childhood	2
2	Introducing a Second Language to Young Learners	2
3	Methods for Introducing a Second Language to Young Learners	3
4	Media for Introducing a Second Language to Young Learners	3

Note. JP = lesson hours

At the beginning of the second session, the instructor explained the importance of introducing English at an early age, emphasizing that young children's brains are like sponges, just as a sponge soaks up water, young children soak up language from their environment, especially when learning happens in meaningful, engaging, and interactive contexts. For instance, children from mixed-language families have shown that early exposure to multiple languages is not a problem, as long as there is meaningful interaction, especially in natural settings. The instructor then discussed Maslow's hierarchy of needs, followed by an explanation of the goals and expectations for introducing a second language to young learners, provided it is done in an appropriate and enjoyable way.

FIGURE 5. Presentation of the importance to learn English for kids

In the practice session, the instructor emphasized the importance of active participation by young learners when learning English. As an example, the instructor asked participants to engage in an interactive activity by asking each other for information such as names, where they live, and their hobbies, and then reporting the results. This activity is shown in Figure 6.

FIGURE 6. Participants ask and report information to model active learner engagement

Additionally, the instructor encouraged participants to use songs as a way to teach topics such as parts of the body. For example, they sang "If You're Happy and You Know It" to make learning more engaging. The instructor also emphasized the use of stories and picture books to support early reading skills. Besides games, teachers were encouraged to prompt students to respond using full sentences. For instance, when the teacher asks, "What is your name?" the student should reply, "My name is…" This practice is illustrated in Figure 7.

FIGURE 7. Participants modeling full-sentence responses during practice activities

Before the end of the last session, there was a question-and-answer segment where participants could ask anything related to the workshop topics, such as how to teach English and how to address specific challenges they face. Some participants shared that certain student already have a good vocabulary and can speak English fluently from watching Disney shows, and asked how to handle this situation. The instructor recommended that teachers respond positively to students who use English and continue to encourage and support the development of their language skills.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service program was attended by 11 early childhood educators and consisted of two sessions aimed at equipping them with practical strategies for teaching English to young learners in an engaging and developmentally appropriate manner. The sessions combined theoretical input with hands-

on activities, enabling participants to understand and apply effective methods for language instruction. During the first session, participants explored the significance of early language exposure. The facilitator emphasized that young children's brains are particularly receptive to linguistic input. Participants were introduced to the principle that vocabulary is best learned through meaningful interaction rather than rote memorization. This approach is supported by recent findings that highlight the role of playful learning and child-centered methods in building foundational language skills in early childhood education (Cade, 2023).

During the practice sessions, teachers implemented the three-period lesson strategy to introduce classroom objects and practiced giving simple instructions in English. Structured speaking activities, such as peer interviews and reporting tasks, were incorporated to model principles of communicative language teaching. Additionally, songs like "If You're Happy and You Know It" and the use of storybooks were introduced as multisensory tools to sustain attention and reinforce vocabulary in meaningful contexts. These strategies align with current pedagogical recommendations for teaching English to young learners, which highlight the effectiveness of interactive media, music, and storytelling in supporting vocabulary development and enhancing learner motivation (Islahuddin, 2023). Teachers were also guided to prompt students to respond in complete sentences, promoting more authentic and natural language use.

A reflective discussion during the final session revealed several insights. Some participants observed that a number of children had already acquired English vocabulary informally through digital media such as Disney movies, consistent with the findings of a study by Mubarokah et al. (2022). Similarly, Ritonga & Rahman HZ (2024) found that Disney movies had a positive influence on students' vocabulary mastery. Other participants reported difficulties in handling mixed-ability classrooms and ensuring equal exposure to English. In response, the facilitator recommended differentiated instruction and peer scaffolding to support less confident learners. This recommendation aligns with the findings of Bhandari et al., (2025), who emphasized that differentiated instruction through personalized tasks, flexible grouping, and collaborative learning can effectively address learner diversity in mixed-ability classrooms and foster a more inclusive learning environment

Quantitative feedback collected at the end of the program showed that over 75% of participants reported an increase in their confidence in planning and delivering English lessons. Specifically, 9 out of 11 teachers indicated that they had previously lacked structured approaches and often selected lesson topics at random. Post-training, participants expressed greater clarity in organizing lesson sequences around foundational themes such as shapes, colors, and numbers. This shift toward structured instructional planning reflects growing awareness among educators about the need for developmental sequencing in early English language education. As Álvarez, (2008) emphasizes, clearly defined instructional sequences such as presentation, practice, and production help teachers build coherence and intentionality in lesson delivery while remaining responsive to classroom dynamics.

Despite these positive outcomes, a recurring challenge was the teachers' limited confidence in using English themselves. This issue is not new; several studies have identified low teacher confidence in English proficiency as a persistent concern within Indonesia's early childhood education context (Purwati et al., 2023; Renandya et al., 2018). This remains a significant barrier, as young learners benefit most from consistent and fluent language models. To address this, follow-up initiatives such as mentoring, peer support, regular online workshops, classroom observation cycles, and collaborative resource-sharing platforms are recommended (Hms & Rizqina, 2025; Sumaryanta et al., 2019). These forms of sustained professional support can help reinforce teacher learning and gradually close gaps in language proficiency. Additionally, Lee et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of research-based professional development programs centered on playful learning approaches to ensure that teachers are effectively supported and that intended student outcomes are achieved.

The program helped increase participants' confidence and teaching skills. It introduced useful methods and engaging strategies for early English instruction. However, ongoing support is still needed to overcome remaining challenges. Future programs should include mentoring, peer collaboration, and access to online resources to support long-term teacher development and better learning outcomes for young children.

CONCLUSION

This community service program successfully improved early childhood educators' skills and confidence in introducing English through structured, interactive approaches such as the three-period lesson strategy, songs, and storytelling. Participants valued the practical strategies and clear frameworks provided, though many expressed the need for continued support to build confidence in using English consistently. To sustain these positive outcomes, follow-up training and ongoing professional development are recommended to reinforce teachers' capacity and ensure lasting improvements in early language instruction. This program provides a replicable model for improving early English education through teacher capacity building in Indonesia.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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