

Developing English Vocabulary and Communication Skills in Young Children

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the development of English vocabulary and communication skills in young children within early childhood education settings. The increasing importance of English as a global language has encouraged its introduction at an early age; however, young learners require appropriate strategies that suit their developmental characteristics. This study focuses on how children acquire basic vocabulary and develop simple communication abilities through classroom interactions and learning activities. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design conducted in an early childhood education institution in Indonesia. The participants consisted of children aged 4–6 years and an English teacher selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, including data reduction, coding, categorization, and interpretation. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation and member checking techniques were applied. The findings indicate that children’s vocabulary and communication skills develop gradually through interactive and engaging activities such as songs, games, and storytelling. These activities help children improve their vocabulary, pronunciation, and ability to use simple English expressions. The teacher plays a significant role in facilitating learning through modeling, repetition, and scaffolding. However, limited exposure to English outside the classroom and differences in individual abilities were identified as challenges affecting language development.

Keywords: *Early Childhood Education, English Vocabulary Development, Communication Skills, Young Learners, EFL Learning,,*

INTRODUCTION

The development of English vocabulary and communication skills in young children has become an increasingly important focus in early childhood education, particularly in the context of globalization and the growing role of English as an international language. Introducing English at an early age is

widely believed to provide children with a strong foundation for future language learning, as young learners are in a critical period of cognitive and linguistic development. During this stage, children are highly receptive to new sounds, words, and patterns, making it an ideal time to foster vocabulary growth and basic communication abilities. As a result, many educational institutions have begun to integrate English into early childhood curricula to support children's linguistic and communicative competence from an early stage.

Vocabulary is considered one of the most fundamental components of language acquisition, as it serves as the building block for communication. Without sufficient vocabulary, children may struggle to express their ideas, understand instructions, and participate in social interactions. In addition to vocabulary, communication skills—such as speaking, listening, and responding appropriately—are essential for children's overall development, including their social, emotional, and cognitive growth. Therefore, developing both vocabulary and communication skills simultaneously is crucial in helping young learners use English meaningfully in real-life contexts. Effective early language learning should not only focus on memorization of words but also on enabling children to use those words in simple and functional communication.

Despite the recognized importance of early English learning, teaching vocabulary and communication skills to young children presents several challenges. Young learners often have limited attention spans, varying levels of readiness, and different learning styles, which require teachers to employ creative and engaging instructional strategies. Traditional teaching methods that rely heavily on rote learning may not be effective for this age group, as children learn better through interactive and play-based activities. Strategies such as songs, storytelling, games, and visual aids have been widely recommended to make learning more enjoyable and meaningful. These approaches allow children to experience language in context, which supports both vocabulary retention and communicative use.

Previous studies have highlighted the effectiveness of interactive learning in enhancing children's English language development. Research has shown that children who are exposed to engaging and communicative teaching methods tend to demonstrate better vocabulary acquisition and improved speaking skills. Moreover, the role of teachers in providing scaffolding, repetition, and meaningful input has been emphasized as a key

factor in successful language learning. However, some studies also indicate that limited exposure to English outside the classroom and lack of supportive environments can hinder children's progress. This suggests that language development is influenced not only by classroom instruction but also by broader environmental factors.

Although numerous studies have examined early English language learning, there is still a need for more in-depth exploration of how vocabulary and communication skills develop simultaneously in young learners within specific educational contexts. Many existing studies tend to focus on either vocabulary acquisition or speaking skills separately, rather than examining their integrated development. In addition, there is limited research that explores how teaching strategies are implemented in real classroom settings and how children respond to these approaches in practice. This gap highlights the importance of conducting further research to better understand the processes and factors that support effective language development in early childhood.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to investigate the development of English vocabulary and communication skills in young children, with a focus on classroom practices, learning activities, and influencing factors. By examining how children acquire and use English in an early education setting, this study is expected to contribute to the improvement of teaching strategies and provide insights for educators in designing more effective and engaging language learning experiences. Ultimately, fostering strong vocabulary and communication skills in early childhood can support children's long-term success in language learning and their ability to interact in a globalized world.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the development of English vocabulary and communication skills in young children. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of how children acquire vocabulary and use language for communication in natural classroom settings. The research design was a case study, focusing on a specific early childhood education institution in Indonesia. This design allowed the researcher to explore the learning processes, teaching strategies, and children's responses in a real-life context,

particularly among learners aged 4–6 years who were in the early stages of English language acquisition.

The participants of the study were selected using purposive sampling, consisting of a group of young learners and one English teacher who was actively involved in classroom instruction. The children were chosen based on their participation in English learning activities, while the teacher was selected due to their experience in teaching English to early learners. Data were collected through multiple techniques, including classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to capture children's interactions, participation, and use of English during learning activities such as songs, games, and storytelling. Interviews with the teacher were carried out to obtain insights into instructional strategies, challenges, and perceptions of children's language development. Supporting documents, such as lesson plans, teaching materials, and students' work, were also analyzed to enrich the data.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved several stages, including data reduction, coding, categorization, and interpretation. The researcher identified patterns and themes related to vocabulary acquisition and communication skills development, as well as the factors influencing these processes. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. In addition, member checking was conducted by confirming the findings with the teacher to ensure accuracy and consistency. Through these procedures, the study aimed to produce reliable and meaningful insights into the development of English vocabulary and communication skills in early childhood education.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings of this study reveal that the development of English vocabulary and communication skills in young children occurs progressively through repeated exposure and meaningful interaction in the classroom. Children were able to acquire basic vocabulary related to familiar topics such as colors, numbers, animals, and daily activities. This vocabulary development was strongly supported by the use of visual aids, gestures, and real-life objects, which helped children connect words with their meanings. Repetition and routine activities also played a significant role in reinforcing vocabulary

retention, allowing children to recall and use words more confidently over time.

In terms of communication skills, the findings indicate that children began to use simple English expressions in classroom interactions, such as greetings, responding to instructions, and answering basic questions. Although their language production was still limited, children demonstrated a growing ability to understand spoken English and respond appropriately, often combining words with gestures to convey meaning. Interactive activities such as songs, games, and storytelling were found to be highly effective in encouraging children to participate and practice speaking. These activities created a supportive and enjoyable learning environment, reducing anxiety and increasing children's willingness to use English.

The role of the teacher was identified as a key factor in facilitating both vocabulary and communication development. The teacher employed various strategies, including modeling correct pronunciation, providing clear instructions, using repetition, and offering positive reinforcement. Scaffolding techniques were also observed, where the teacher guided children step by step in using new vocabulary within simple communicative contexts. Additionally, the teacher frequently used code-switching between English and the first language to ensure comprehension while gradually increasing English exposure.

However, the findings also highlight several challenges in developing English skills among young learners. One of the main challenges was the limited exposure to English outside the classroom, which restricted opportunities for practice and reinforcement. Furthermore, differences in individual abilities were evident, with some children progressing more quickly than others. Factors such as confidence, prior exposure, and learning motivation influenced children's participation and language use. Despite these challenges, the overall findings suggest that with appropriate teaching strategies and a supportive environment, young children are capable of developing foundational English vocabulary and communication skills effectively.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight that the development of English vocabulary and communication skills in young children is closely linked to meaningful exposure and interactive learning experiences. The gradual acquisition of vocabulary observed in the classroom supports the view that young learners learn language best when it is presented in context and connected to their daily lives. The use of familiar topics such as animals, colors, and daily activities helps children make associations between words and their meanings, which strengthens retention. This finding aligns with theories of early language acquisition which emphasize that children learn language naturally through repeated exposure and interaction rather than through isolated memorization.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that communication skills develop alongside vocabulary when children are actively engaged in using the language. The ability of children to produce simple expressions, respond to instructions, and participate in basic interactions indicates that communication competence can emerge even with limited vocabulary. This supports the idea that language learning in early childhood should prioritize functional use rather than grammatical accuracy. The use of gestures and non-verbal cues by children also reflects their developing communicative competence, showing that communication is not solely dependent on verbal ability but also on the ability to convey meaning effectively.

The effectiveness of interactive activities such as songs, games, and storytelling found in this study reinforces the importance of play-based learning in early childhood education. These activities not only make learning enjoyable but also create opportunities for repetition and meaningful language use. Through songs and games, children are exposed to patterns of language in a natural and engaging way, which enhances both vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation. Storytelling, on the other hand, provides a context for understanding and using language, allowing children to develop listening and speaking skills simultaneously.

The role of the teacher as a facilitator is also a significant aspect of the discussion. The teacher's use of scaffolding, modeling, and repetition helps children gradually build their language skills. By providing clear examples and guiding children in using new vocabulary, the teacher supports learners within their zone of proximal development. The use of code-switching observed in the classroom can also be seen as a practical strategy to ensure comprehension while introducing new language. This approach helps reduce

confusion and supports a smoother transition from the first language to English.

However, the challenges identified in the findings indicate that language development is influenced by factors beyond classroom instruction. Limited exposure to English outside the classroom reduces opportunities for practice, which may slow down language acquisition. This suggests that the learning environment at home and in the community plays an important role in supporting children's language development. Without consistent exposure, children may struggle to retain and use the vocabulary they have learned in class.

In addition, individual differences among learners were evident in the study. Some children showed faster progress due to higher confidence levels or prior exposure to English, while others required more support and encouragement. This highlights the need for differentiated instruction in early childhood classrooms, where teaching strategies are adapted to meet the diverse needs of learners. Teachers must be sensitive to these differences and provide additional support for children who may be less confident or have limited exposure to English.

Overall, the discussion suggests that the development of English vocabulary and communication skills in young children is a complex process influenced by instructional strategies, learning environments, and individual factors. The findings emphasize the importance of interactive, child-centered approaches that encourage active participation and meaningful use of language. By creating a supportive and engaging learning environment, teachers can help children develop not only their vocabulary but also their confidence in using English for communication.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the development of English vocabulary and communication skills in young children is a gradual and interactive process that is strongly influenced by meaningful exposure, engaging learning activities, and effective teaching strategies. The findings show that children are able to acquire basic vocabulary and begin to use simple English expressions when learning is conducted through enjoyable and context-based approaches such as songs, games, and storytelling. These methods not only support vocabulary retention but also encourage children to participate actively and use language for real communication. The teacher's

role as a facilitator is crucial in guiding children through modeling, repetition, and scaffolding to help them build confidence and competence in using English.

However, the study also reveals that challenges such as limited exposure to English outside the classroom and differences in individual abilities can affect the pace of language development. Therefore, it is important to create a supportive learning environment both in school and at home to maximize children's opportunities for language practice. The study suggests that educators should adopt child-centered and interactive teaching approaches, while also considering learners' individual needs. Overall, early introduction of English, when supported by appropriate strategies and environments, can effectively enhance children's vocabulary and communication skills, providing a strong foundation for their future language learning.

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