

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF INTRODUCING ENGLISH AT AN EARLY AGE

Adhe Risky Mayasari¹

¹Syariah Banking Study Program, Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business , Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung

Correspondence*:

Address: Sukarame, Bandarlampung City, Indonesia, 35131 | e-mail : adheriskymayasari@radenintan.ac.id ¹

Abstract

Objective: Global competition in various fields demands adequate and accountable mastery of skills and academic competencies. To improve the quality of human resources in education, mastery of foreign languages, especially English, is very important and has become a common thing to be mastered by many people if they want to compete in the future. This is based on English, a global language used in the current era throughout the world, including Indonesia. Introducing English early on should be supported by adequate facilities and infrastructure to create an exciting learning atmosphere between teachers and students. Teachers, as a component of managing the learning process, need to understand the framework of early childhood thinking so that learning management can be done well. Learning should be managed in such a way as to create meaningful and enjoyable learning activities. This research emphasizes the importance of teaching English in early childhood to support cognitive and social development. English as an international language is essential in global communication, so its mastery is an urgent need for modern society, including Indonesia.

Methods: This type of research is qualitative research that does not conduct systematic calculations, statistics, etc. but instead uses scientific emphasis or research that produces findings that cannot be achieved using statistical procedures or other means of qualification

Findings:With a qualitative approach and data collection from documentation accompanied by questionnaires, the results show that, according to the teachers, challenges such as lack of teacher training and low motivation in students can be overcome with school support and interactive teaching methods. In addition, the early introduction of English improves children's language skills and prepares them for further education and an increasingly connected world. Therefore, schools and educators need to improve competencies through continuous training, providing adequate resources, and developing exciting and relevant teaching strategies.

Originality: Master of English is necessary for a child to look at life in the future. This research wants to know a teacher's perception towards his students to learn English as early as possible.

Keywords: *English teaching, early childhood, global communication, teacher training*

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Introduction

In this era, English is the most widely used international language and the language of science. English is the most widely used language by the world's population, which then makes English an international language. According to Rima, et al (2019) teaching English to children from an early age is not easy, it takes stimulation to stimulate their language skills. The dominance of the use of English to connect and transfer information throughout the world, raises the assumption that mastery of English is a necessity that must be owned by modern society. Early childhood is no exception and children are starting to be familiarized with learning English. English language skills have become mandatory for people worldwide, especially in Indonesia. Foreign language education for children in America and Europe started in the fifties and became very popular in the sixties; however, it somewhat decreased in the seventies. English education and learning are based on the belief that learning a foreign language or second language will be better if it starts earlier. (Amiruddin & Jannah, 2021)

Although English is a foreign language in Indonesia, it is essential to start teaching children the language from an early age. It is the primary means of communication outside of Indonesia and is a universal language widely used for simple global communication. Many schools already use different learning methods for early childhood learning assistance to interest children in learning English, such as using words, fruits, the alphabet, or pictures. In addition, it can be taught through English words, items depicted in pictures, or even animated English movies. English is recognized as an international language, and is used by everyone who travels and interacts with people at home, making it essential for everyone. Even if they cannot communicate in English, at least they will use it, impacting how young children easily interact with others as they grow and develop. (Arumsari et al., 2017)

Children need to learn English in an engaging way from an early age to be open to new experiences. In addition, a child's attention span is only 5 to 10 minutes in the beginning. After this time, it is easy for the child's focus to wander, so it is essential to include exciting stimuli to keep them engaged during the allotted time. While brain processing theory states that it is best to introduce stimuli into the first language early on, there is a difference between teaching children English from a young age and children who have grown up (Astari et al., 2020). Given that children's brains are supported from a young age, offering a range of support is essential to develop children's language and other skills. In addition, the facilities obtained by a learner must be given maximally from an early age in order to support and develop their abilities along with the perception that learning English or added languages other than their daily language will make it easier and faster to understand a learning concept, besides that the learning process is combined with play. There are advantages and disadvantages, but as parents and educators, you must plan to improve other language skills, such as English, from an early age so that children do not spend time playing and do not overload the child's brain. Early childhood education is the foundation for technical education for children, aiming to provide them with the most excellent and most effective education and support possible. (Bangun et al., 2024)

Children's language development starts when the child is born using the most straightforward language or pre-talk, namely "crying", then development in the form of "babble or babble", simple words or sentences accompanied by body movements to complement speech in early growth. In educational psychology theory, an early learning theory can be used as a teaching foundation for early childhood. A well-known learning theory model is the intellectual or cognitive development approach proposed by Jean Piaget (1896-1980). Cognitive development is generally closely related to a child's motor development. Cognitive development describes how your child's mind develops and functions as it should to think and process the brain according to what it understands. Cognitive development is the process by which individuals can improve their ability to use their knowledge and brain to observe what happens before them. Cognitive development is a mental function that includes perception, thought, symbols, reasoning, and solving problems being seen or faced. Cognitive development is interpreted as a strategy to reduce the world's complexity. cognitive development is also interpreted as how humans describe experiences about the world and how to organize the experiences of each individual.

So, when children learn English, they are in the preoperational stage, when they are 2 to 7 years old. Therefore, each individual needs a lot of illustrations, models, pictures, and other activities that can spur the cognition of each individual. The results obtained by each child will not be the same as those obtained by others, so in this process, the perception cannot be equalized. If a child cannot understand

something, then according to the theory, the child is not mentally ready or cannot focus on what is happening. In this case, the lesson a child learns is to have a social value; for English language learning, this social interaction can be carried out in pair or group tasks. Piaget and Vygotsky's theories can provide important information on how we think about children as students or language learning, especially foreign languages. According to Piaget, children are active learners and thinkers; therefore, continuous stimulation is necessary. They constantly interact with what they see, hear and touch, continuously with the world of their environment and solve the problems they face in the environment so that the learning process occurs actively. This is produced by the child, not from the results of imitating others and is obtained from birth.

Introducing English early to Indonesian children can be assumed to support the statement of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia at the commemoration of National Education Day on May 2, 2013. The Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia at the time, Mohammad Nuh, proclaimed the golden generation as the theme of the commemoration of National Education Day in 2013. The design was based on the fact that from 2010 to 2035, Indonesia received a huge demographic bonus from the abundance of the golden age of a child, the largest productive age population in the country's history. Massive investment in human resource development will be made to welcome the 100th anniversary of Indonesia's independence in 2045. The Minister of Education and Culture also supports the Paudnisasi movement, encouraging expanding access to education at all levels to raise the golden generation. An excellent and equitable quality of education is the key to success in raising the golden generation. The golden age of children spans from 2 to 7 years old, so all aspects of language must be introduced to children before this sensitive period ends.

From an early age, children need to learn English in an engaging way to be open to new experiences, and teaching English to them is different from teaching English to students in high school. Also, a child's attention span is only the initial 5 to 10 minutes, so it is essential to include exciting stimuli to keep them engaged for the allotted time. Since brain processing theory states that it is best to introduce stimuli into the first language early on, there is a difference between teaching children English from a young age and children who have grown up. (Astari et al., 2020) Given that children's brains are supported from a young age, offering a range of support is essential to develop children's language and other abilities. In addition, the facilities that must be provided to children learning English must be maximized from an early age in order to support the perception that learning English or languages other than the local language will make it easier and faster to understand a learning concept, in addition to the learning process combined with play. There are advantages and disadvantages, but as a parent and educator, you must plan to improve your child's English from an early age so that the child does not spend time playing and does not overload the child's brain. Early childhood education is the basis for technical education for children, aiming to provide them with the largest and most effective education and support possible. (Bangun et al., 2024)

The phenomenon that arises today is the increasing number of school curricula that use English as a language of communication to speed up a child's understanding. Schools offer these programs because of parents' awareness that English is necessary for a child to support their future career. (Diniyah, 2017) Optimizing English learning at the earliest level will create maximum results. Another factor that is most important in children's learning process at an early age is the presence of good quality teachers. Teachers must be able to master the need for the use of English, which is increasing every year. One example of evidence is the increasing number of teacher job vacancies that prioritize teachers being able to use English in teaching subjects. What needs to be remembered is that the demand to be able and master English is not only in English subjects but in other subjects. (Erna Marlia Susfenti, 2021)

The phenomenon of the need for general subject teachers who must be able and master English is inevitable, especially in schools that hold the status of International Schools. Teachers, as the spearhead of any learning, will be a severe and main concern because measuring a student's success rate is when the learning done by the teacher is appropriate and in accordance with the available curriculum. With English, educators can connect with international educator networks, participate in global education forums, and share experiences and best practices in teaching. (Hijriati, 2017) In addition, teachers can also communicate with international students who may be present in their schools, creating a diverse and inclusive learning environment. English language skills provide easier access to various international educational resources. Teachers can access the latest journals, articles, books, and learning materials from countries with the best education. Many modern educational resources, such as online learning platforms, tutorial videos, and educational apps, are in English. Teachers who master the English language will find it easier to utilize

technology in learning and improve the efficiency of the classroom learning process.(Ihwanudin et al., 2020)

This is one of the factors that prevent English from being applied and taught to children because it is not practiced in everyday life in interaction, so children who have good language skills will have an impact on their academic, language, and social skills. In addition, children will be ready to enter a context of association with various languages and cultures so that when they grow up, they will have quality human resources, competitive spirit, and understanding and appreciation of their language and culture will also develop if children learn foreign languages early on.(Ismi Yulizar et al., 2023) Therefore, educators need to implement fun and not dull learning to achieve each lesson's objectives. On the other hand, learning strategies require teachers to be creative in organizing all learning preparations to achieve learning objectives that arouse students' motivation to participate enthusiastically in learning. This is the case in English lessons for early childhood, where educators must be able to manage the class to build a conducive and pleasant learning atmosphere.(Jazuly & Ahmad, 2016)

In addition to learning strategies, teaching materials, and infrastructure must also be adequate. If the implementation of the learning process is good, it will have a positive impact on the quality of the resulting learning. The implementation of quality learning is characterized by the involvement of all components and the high enthusiasm of students in participating in learning. Learning evaluation will identify problems that are expected to result from learning in completing the shortcomings of the previous one, both in terms of learning processes and infrastructure. The main benefit of evaluation is to identify problems that will focus on measuring the achievement of predetermined learning programs and the achievement of assessments made by educators. In learning English as a foreign language, according to previous research, children need to play with the language, try it out, test it, receive feedback, and try it again.

This is how children test their understanding of linguistic rules and adapt to their world. For the language learning process to be taught to children to bring maximum results. Cameron (2010:19) says several principles must be considered in learning language for children (Literacy et al., 2021) namely: (1) children actively try to 'make sense, that is, to find and construct the meanings and purposes that adults tell them and ask them to do; (2) children need space for their language development. In language and cognitive development, children's potential is essential for effective learning; (3) children need expert help in seeing and presenting aspects of foreign language that carry meaning; (4) development can be seen as internalization from social interaction. Language can grow as children take over the language used in early life with other children and adults; (5) children learn a foreign language depending on what they experience. There is an essential relationship between what and how children are taught and what children learn. Based on some of the explanations above, this research wants to examine how teachers think about learning English in early childhood. The phenomenon that is developing at this time is that parents are competing to provide English education and facilities from an early age to improve their abilities in the future. Besides, the hope that will be generated is that children will have other language skills besides the local language.(Mar'ah Daulay & Pransiska, 2022). This research wants to see and conclude a teacher's perception of his students who learn English from an early age, so that it becomes an additional skill and increases the number of languages mastered by a student.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cognitive development, in general, is closely related to an individual's motor development period. Cognitive development describes how a child's mind develops and functions as it should so that it can think and solve problems that occur in front of it. Cognitive development is how individuals can improve their ability to use their knowledge to answer problems. Cognitive development is a mental function that includes perception, thought, symbols, reasoning, and problem-solving. As early as possible, a child is invited to train his cognitive development to develop a child from an early age, given practice, including learning English with illustrations. Cognition is interpreted as a strategy to reduce the world's complexity. Cognition is also interpreted as a way for humans to describe experiences about the world and organize their experiences. Aspects that are monitored from the Development of Cognitive aspects are:

1. Figurative information/knowledge
2. Procedural/operative knowledge
3. Temporal and special knowledge

4. Knowledge and memory recall

For decades, research in language education has focused on teaching English in early childhood. Studies show that introducing a foreign language at an early age has significant benefits for children's cognitive and social development.

1. **Cognitive Benefits of Foreign Language Teaching:** According to Bialystok (2001), children who learn a second language early on show improvements in problem-solving abilities and creative thinking skills. This is because second language learning encourages children to think more flexibly and develop metalinguistic abilities, which is thinking about and analyzing language as a system. (Muttaqin et al., 2020)
2. **Social and Emotional Benefits:** Research by Hoff (2006) reveals that children who learn a foreign language tend to have better social skills, including communicating more effectively and efficiently in forming interpersonal relationships. Foreign language learning can also boost children's self-confidence and self-esteem as they can communicate with more people from different cultural backgrounds. (Nugroho et al., 2023)
3. **Teaching Approaches and Methods:** According to Cameron (2010), teaching language to young children should be interactive and fun. Effective teaching methods include using games, songs, stories, and engaging digital media. These methods not only make learning more fun but also help children assimilate language more naturally.
4. **Challenges in English Language Teaching:** Rima et al. (2019) identified several challenges in early childhood English language teaching in Indonesia, including a lack of specialized teacher training and low student motivation. The research suggests that school support and interactive teaching methods can help overcome these challenges.
5. **The Importance of Teacher Training:** Research by Darling-Hammond (2000) confirms that teacher competence strongly influences teaching quality. Teachers who receive ongoing training can better adapt effective and innovative teaching methods, which improves student learning outcomes.

HYPOTHESIS

Based on the above literature review, the following hypotheses are interrelated and connect to provide a comprehensive picture of the importance of English language teaching in early childhood. Introducing English in early childhood significantly improves children's cognitive abilities, especially in creative thinking and problem-solving skills. Children who learn English early on will experience an increase in creative thinking skills because the second language learning process encourages flexibility of thinking and the development of metalinguistic skills. In addition, by mastering the ability of a second language, the knowledge gained by a child will increase which is sourced from abroad with the use of the primary language of English. This positively impacts their ability to solve problems and adapt to new situations. (Nurjaman et al., 2019). Introducing English in early childhood positively impacts children's social and emotional development, including communication skills and self-confidence. Learning English expands children's social range by improving their ability to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds. It helps them form better interpersonal relationships and increases their confidence and self-esteem in social contexts. This stimulant will influence children to facilitate and understand from any source of knowledge that uses English as the basis for communication.

Using interactive and fun teaching methods significantly increases students' motivation to learn to learn English. Teaching methods that involve active interaction, such as games, songs, stories, and digital media, will make learning English more interesting and relevant to children. This increases their intrinsic motivation and strengthens their emotional connection to the language being learned. (Pertiwi et al., 2021). Every new word and utterance they get will make it easier to string sentences together to interact and understand what they get. Continuous training for teachers significantly improves the effectiveness of early childhood English language teaching. Teachers who receive ongoing training will be better prepared for the challenges of teaching English in early childhood, such as adapting to students' individual learning styles and implementing innovative teaching methods. This will contribute to improving teaching quality and student learning outcomes. (Rahmaniah et al., 2021). Teachers, as the frontline for delivering information, must have training carried out annually in the hope that a child's skill ability will increase.

Adequate support from schools, including the provision of sufficient resources, has a positive impact on the success of early childhood English language teaching. Schools that provide a supportive

educational environment, including adequate physical and human resources, will create optimal conditions for early childhood English language learning. This support will assist teachers in implementing effective teaching programs and increase student participation and learning achievement. (Risarani et al., 2023). These hypotheses are interrelated and support each other in understanding more deeply how English language teaching at an early age can provide significant cognitive, social, and emotional benefits for children. Further research can test and confirm the cause-and-effect relationships between the variables involved in these hypotheses.

Method

This type of research is qualitative research that does not conduct systematic calculations, statistics, etc. but instead uses scientific emphasis or research that produces findings that cannot be achieved using statistical procedures or other means of qualification. This research uses documentation data collection techniques from books, journals, and information.

Result and Discussion

By age 6, children can say around 10,000 words and string them into simple sentences. Language development is one aspect of development in children that is interrelated with other development aspects. Bjorklund (2005), suggests that the development of language skills is related to speech development; language skills will be honed if people are able to speak optimally, and if the child's language skills are good, then the child will be more confident in speaking, especially in English. Since English is a foreign language in Indonesia, the learning process requires appropriate and effective strategies and approaches. Teachers, as educators, have become essential aspects of the development of English in early childhood. (Satrianingrum et al., 2020). A teacher who can develop and improve his teaching skills must always be motivated because teachers also need motivation in every teaching session. High motivation and enthusiasm from a teacher towards his student will make it easier for a student to receive the knowledge provided. In addition to motivation, teachers must also be supported by adequate facilities and infrastructure and, of course, must be as needed. Without facilities and infrastructure that meet the needs, a teacher's learning pattern will not be optimal for his students. Teachers at the forefront of teaching always support programs made by schools to improve the abilities of teachers and their students. Recent research through questionnaires by researchers corroborates the importance of introducing English at an early age. (Sriyeni & Gumindari, 2021) The survey data shows that although there are some challenges, such as teacher training needs and student motivation issues, the benefits of early English language teaching are substantial. With the proper support from schools and the use of interactive teaching methods, teaching English can be a positive and rewarding experience for students. Here is a further breakdown of the findings from the survey:

Findings from the Survey

1. Teacher Training Needs

The survey data shows that most teachers (9 out of 15) have no specialized training for teaching English to children, although almost all teachers (14 out of 15) feel the need for further training. This shows the importance of continuous training programs to improve teachers' competence and confidence in teaching English. The program can start from related institutions such as the Ministry of Education, the Indonesian Teachers' Association, the Provincial Education Office, and the City/District Education Office, as well as the central and local governments' concern for programs aimed at improving teachers' skills. In addition, schools or foundations are advised to organize training to improve a teacher's ability. Teachers who are taken care of in terms of their skills and training needs will feel more confident in teaching in front of their students.

2. Support and Resources from the School

Most teachers feel that the school provides enough support (13 out of 15) and resources (10 out of 15) for English language teaching. However, there is room for improvement in providing more comprehensive and adequate resources to support the learning process (Sukmawati et al., 2023). Schools are advised to always discuss what is needed with teachers because teachers are the ones in the field, so

they know what is a priority in teaching. With adequate facilities as needed, teachers will be valued and work more optimally to help students succeed.

3. Importance of Early Years Teaching

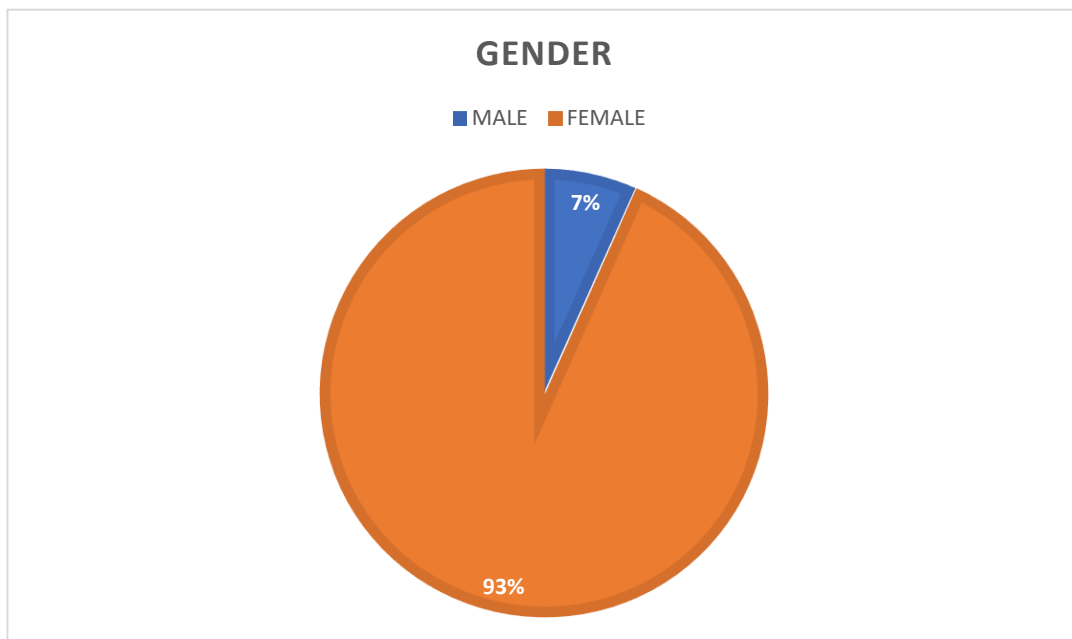
All 15 teachers surveyed agreed that introducing English early is essential. This introduction can improve students' cognitive abilities and prepare them for further education. In addition, it enhances a child's language skills. Early learning makes it easier for children to understand information sources that use English. English language skills will benefit students in interacting.

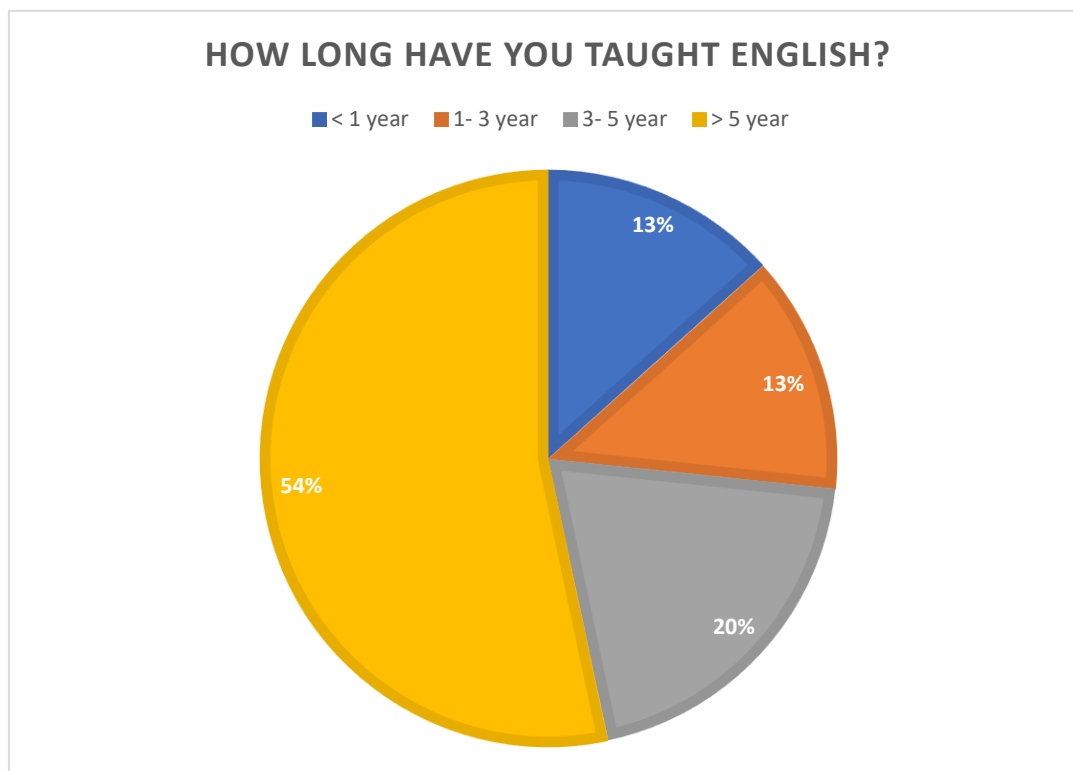
4. Teaching Methods Used

All teachers use playful methods in teaching English, and most (12 out of 15) use educational apps as teaching aids. These interactive methods are essential to maintain students' interest and motivation. (Ulya & Na'imah, 2022). In addition, using the play method will improve students' understanding of what is meant. A teacher must be trained to upgrade learning methods to develop and transfer knowledge to students.

5. Student Motivation Issues

Most teachers (12 out of 15) encountered the problem of low student motivation to learn English. This suggests the need for more innovative approaches relevant to children's daily lives to increase their motivation. Teachers and students must always be motivated to increase their enthusiasm for learning. Continuous motivation accompanied by an appropriate learning motivation program can increase a teacher's and students' confidence in studying.





Conclusion and future direction

This research emphasizes the importance of teaching English in early childhood as a foundation for their cognitive and social development. While there are challenges, such as a lack of specialized training for teachers and low motivation of students, sufficient support from schools and the use of interactive teaching methods can overcome most of these obstacles. The early introduction of English improves children's language skills and prepares them for further education and an increasingly connected global world. Therefore, it is essential for schools and educators to continuously improve their competencies through continuous training and providing adequate resources, as well as developing teaching strategies that are engaging and relevant to children's daily lives.

Suggestions

1. **Improved Teacher Training:** Continuous training programs should be held to improve teachers' competence and confidence in teaching English to children. The training should be based on teachers' needs and requests, as teachers in the field should always be trained according to the times.
2. **Provision of Resources:** Schools need to provide more comprehensive and adequate resources to support the English language learning process. Quality resources will improve students' learning outcomes. The vision and mission of the education implementing agency will then achieve the target.
3. **Innovative Teaching Methods:** Interactive teaching methods that are interactive and relevant to children's daily lives should be continuously developed to increase student motivation. Teachers who are motivators in teaching should be given training so that they will create improvements in their innovative teaching. Improved innovativeness will make the learning process more engaging for students.

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