

Parents' Perceptions of English Language Teaching in Early Childhood: A Case Study of Kindergartens in Probolinggo

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ABSTRACT

The growing emphasis on English language teaching in early childhood has increased parents' awareness of its potential contribution to children's future language development. This study aims to explore parents' perceptions of English language teaching in kindergartens in Probolinggo, East Java, and to examine the role of parental support in children's early English learning. A qualitative approach was employed through semi-structured interviews with five parents of children aged four to six years, consisting of two fathers and three mothers, supported by one additional informant who was a doctoral student and parent of a four-year-old child. The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes. The findings indicate that parents perceive English as an important global language and strongly support its introduction from an early age. They believe that early English learning contributes to children's language development, self-confidence, and future educational and career opportunities. Parents also recognize that active involvement at home through daily communication and continuous encouragement plays a crucial role in reinforcing children's learning experiences. These findings highlight the importance of collaboration between schools and families in creating meaningful early English learning environments and provide practical insights for educators and policymakers in designing parent-inclusive language education programs.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In this age, the child's brain is still open to learning linguistics; therefore, early childhood English education is increasingly receiving attention, as the belief holds that children who study a foreign language at an early age will have superior language skills in the future. Many kindergartens and early childhood education facilities are beginning to integrate English education into their curricula (KOVELMAN et al., 2008; Mamadayupova & Khaydarova, 2025). This opinion about teaching English to young children is important and should be taken into account. Early childhood is the perfect time to encourage the development of a foreign language (Dewi, 2020).

The present study theoretically grounded in Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) proposed by Lenneberg (1967), which argues that early childhood represents an optimal period for language acquisition because children's brains exhibit greater neural plasticity than those of adults. According to this perspective, introducing particularly in pronunciation, vocabulary development, and communicative competence. Although the Critical Period Hypothesis has been widely discussed in second language acquisition research, its successful implementation depends not only on children's biological readiness but also on the learning environment that supports language exposure and practice.

This study also informed by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes that children's cognitive and language development occurs through social interaction with more knowledgeable others, particularly parents and teachers (Vygotsky, 1978). From this perspective, parents play an essential role in providing linguistic scaffolding, encouragement, and meaningful opportunities for children to use English in everyday contexts. Therefore, parents' perception are not treated merely as individual opinions but as reflections of the sociocultural environment that shapes children's opportunities to acquire English. These theoretical perspectives provide the analytical framework for interpreting how parents perceive the value of early English language teaching and the role they assume in supporting their children's language development.

Satrianingrum & Prasetyo (2020) also noted that there is concern that if children learn English from a young age, they will not have time to play. Parents need to create a comprehensive program to support their children's English learning. Parents can greatly enrich their children's vocabulary through natural or international conversations.

The home is the most important educational environment for children's development (Wiresti, 2020). Academic success is important to the parent-child relationship because parents have to work hard to prepare their children for school and life (Li et al., 2023; Mao, 2022; Zong et al., 2018).

Previous studies have consistently reported that parents generally hold positive attitudes toward introducing English in early childhood. For example, Chaniago et al. (2023) found that most parents believe English should be introduced from early age because it supports children's language development and future educational opportunities. Similarly, Diniyah (2017) showed that parents and teachers viewed English as an important component of early childhood education, although concerns remained regarding age appropriateness and instructional approaches. These studies demonstrate a broad consensus that English is considered beneficial for young learner.

However, previous research has primarily focused on measuring parents' general attitudes toward early English learning or examining the perceived importance of English in early childhood education. Limited attention has been given implications of early English instruction or how they perceive their own role in supporting children's language learning beyond the classroom. Moreover, earlier studies rarely integrate these perception within a theoretical perspective that explains how parental beliefs influence children's language developmeny through family interaction and learning environments.

Therefore, the present study extend previous research by exploring parents' perception through the lenses of the Critical Period Hypothesis and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. Rather than merely identifying whether parents support English instruction, this study investigates how parents understand its long-term value, how they envision their responsibilities in facilitating children's English learning at home, and how these perceptions shape expectations for children's future educational and professional opportunities. Accordingly, the novelty of this study lies not simply in its focus on Probolinggo but in its theoretically informed interpretation of parental perception and their implications for early childhood English education.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study involved only five parents and one supporting informant from Probolinggo, which limits the transferability of the findings to other geographical and sociocultural contexts. Second, the findings are based solely on participants' self-reported perception obtained through interviews without direct classroom observations or other forms of data triangulation. Consequently, the study reflects parents' subjective perspectives rather than actual teaching practices or children's language outcome. Finally, although thematic analysis was employed to explore participants' experiences in depth, the relatively small sample size may not capture the diversity of parental perceptions across different educational, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds. Future research is therefore encouraged to involve a larger and more diverse sample, adopt multiple data collection methods, and employ mixed-methods or longitudinal design to provide a more comprehensive understanding of parents' perception of early English language teaching (Nakamura, 2019).

Although research has examined parents' views on the relevance of English for young children, most studies are general and do not specifically analyze parental opinions on English teaching, particularly in the Probolinggo area. Previous research has focused more on parents' views about their children's abilities or the relevance of English than on expectations, benefits, and aspirations for the future use of English as a language of instruction in school. This study is still necessary to investigate in greater depth the perspectives of parents in Probolinggo regarding the social environment, culture, and education.

II. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore parents' perceptions of English language teaching in kindergartens in Probolinggo. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to recruit participants who could provide rich and relevant information regarding the phenomenon under investigation. The inclusion criteria required participants to (1) be the parent or primary caregiver of a child aged four to six years enrolled in a kindergarten in Probolinggo, (2) have direct experience with their child's English learning at school, and (3) be willing to participate voluntarily in an in-depth interview. Based on these criteria, five parents, consisting of three mothers and two fathers, were selected. In addition, one supporting informant, a doctoral student who was also the parent of a four-year-old child, was included to provide complementary perspectives and enhance data richness.

The number of participants was considered appropriate for this qualitative inquiry because interviews continued until data saturation was achieved. No substantially new themes or categories emerged from the later interviews, indicating that the collected data were sufficient to address the research objectives and capture the range of parental perceptions regarding early English language teaching.

The interviews lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes each. This duration was considered appropriate to obtain sufficient information without making the informants feel uncomfortable. Each interview session was conducted face-to-face in a comfortable setting for both the researcher and the informants, such as at home, in a kitchen, or at a mosque. One informant requested that the interview be conducted at the mosque because it was quiet and far from the crowd. The informant was also a mosque caretaker in Brabe, Probolinggo. A flexible semi-structured interview guide was used to allow the informants to express their experiences, feelings, and views more freely and naturally regarding English learning at an early age.

The interviews focused on five main issues relevant to this study's context. These included parents' initial reactions and first impressions when they learned that their children were learning English in kindergarten, including concerns about whether the children were too young to learn the language. The interviews also explored parents' views on the benefits of teaching English to young children, the competitive advantages that children might gain, the role of parents in supporting their children's education at home, and parents' expectations for their children's future.

After all interviews had been completed, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Braun & Clarke (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. The analysis began with repeated reading of the transcripts to achieve familiarity with the data. During the second phase, initial code were generated by identifying meaningful statements related to parents' perceptions of early English language teaching. Similar codes were then grouped into broader categories, from which preliminary themes were developed. These themes were subsequently reviewed, refined, and clearly defined to ensure that each theme accurately represented the participants' experiences and addressed the research objectives.

To enhance the trustworthiness and consistency of the analysis, the coding process was independently reviewed by a second researcher familiar with qualitative research methods. Any discrepancies in coding or theme verification helped improve the credibility and transparency of the Critical Period Hypothesis and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which served as the theoretical framework for understanding parent's perceptions of early English language teaching. The research procedure is illustrated in Figure 1.

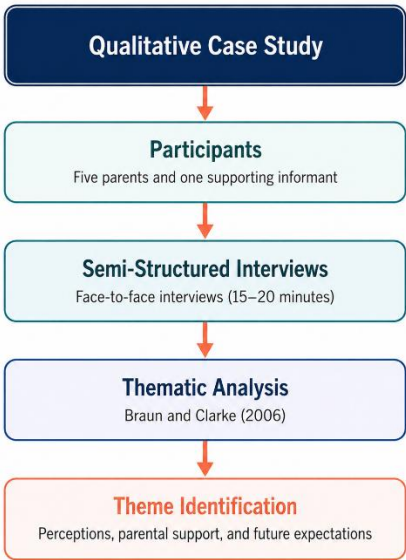


Figure 1. Research Procedure

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Parents' Perceptions of English Language Learning and the Benefits for Early Childhood

Parents generally agreed that introducing English at an early age is important. They expressed happiness and pride when they learned that their children were studying English in kindergarten because they viewed English as an international language widely used for global communication. Most participants believed that English proficiency would provide their children with broader educational and career opportunities in the future. They also perceived that children who begin learning English at an early age may find it easier to acquire the language than those who start later in life.

"I believe it is better to learn English at a young age than to start learning as an adult. I feel that I started too late, and learning English has become more difficult for me. Therefore, I do not want my son to experience the same situation." (P1, Interview, 2026).

This statement reflects parents' belief that early exposure to English learning could help children become more prepared for subsequent English learning at school. However, these views represent parents' perceptions and expectations rather than direct evidence of children's cognitive or psychological development.

In line with these perceptions, parents emphasized that English instruction in early childhood should focus on simple and age-appropriate language exposure. They suggested introducing basic vocabulary, such as letters, numbers, colours, animals, fruits, and everyday expressions ("Hi", "Good Morning", and "What is your name?"), through enjoyable learning activities that match children's development characteristics.

Most participants also believe that early familiarity with basic English vocabulary and simple expressions could help children feel better prepared when learning more advanced English at higher levels of education. Some parents expected that this early foundation would make children more comfortable participating in English lessons and support their future educational and professional opportunities. Nevertheless, these findings should be understood as parents' perceptions based on their personal experiences and expectations rather than as evidence that early English instruction directly improves children's self-confidence or higher-order thinking skills.

The Role of Parents in Learning English at Home

Each informant in Probolinggo concurred that parents should make a concerted effort to help their children learn English at home rather than rely solely on the school and an English teacher. Parents can teach their kids using simple methods and materials, such as food and drink. Parents can make simple sentences and then follow them with their children. For example, "This is rice, I like meatball. This is orange juice, I have apple, etc."

Parents must create a comfortable, fun learning environment so that children can learn English easily and feel happy. As a result, children who consistently practice at home can improve in English lessons because their parents consistently support them and provide the best basic English instruction.

One informant said, "The role of parents at home is very important, that's why there is a saying that parents are a child's first educators." (P2, Interview, 2026).

This research aligns with previous research showing that parental responsibility cannot be replaced. Parents are expected to have a basic understanding of English and the ability to teach it to their children at home. Children can count from 1 to 20 or mention names when they meet new friends. For example, "Hi, my name is Indah Dwi Lestari, you can call me Indah, Nice to meet you, etc." Parents who provide warmth, security, and affection to their children from an early age might help their children grow up trusting those around

them. If they successfully pass this step, children will more easily acquire self-confidence and take ownership of their responsibilities. In other words, they will not be affected by anxieties (Diniyah, 2017).

It is also crucial to consider how parents' emotional and language abilities interact. A child's effort may be hampered if parents lack confidence and do not communicate with them. Additionally, it may cause a child to lose faith in themselves or become stuck in school. It can not happen. Therefore, using parental support and developing a brief but engaging communication program is the best way to help parents improve their basic language skills.

Parents' Expectations for The Future

Five parents were interviewed, and it became evident that they have high hopes for their kids' future when it comes to learning English in nursery. They are very optimistic about the jobs their sons and daughters will have. According to two of five informants, children who take control of English at an early age will find it easier to compete at a global level, such as when they choose to study abroad or join a student exchange program.

The expert also assumed that parents who teach their children English in kindergarten are the best way to benefit in the long term from an educational and professional perspective. According to research on early childhood learning, learning English as an international language from kindergarten age can lay the foundation of bilingualism (Jonathan & Hadi, 2024). As a result, children will have easier access to higher education, including international courses or programs such as ICE (International Course English), which students can take at universities abroad. English is now an important skill in many industries worldwide. So, children who have a strong foundation in English critical thinking will usually get job opportunities in the future.

In addition, there aren't many jobs in Probolinggo. In Probolinggo, it depends only on building workers and bricklayers, whose salaries are small. This situation creates limited economic options for local people, especially for those who are only high school graduates. Obviously, we face difficulties finding jobs that match our skills or education. Low pay encourages high mobility to other cities or to informal sectors that lack social protection. So if a family has a low income, they cannot provide their children with education, such as English courses or study materials that can help them find a job in the future. Many people in Probolinggo are also struggling to find decent jobs. Because of this, parents view English as a vital skill that will enable their children to obtain employment both domestically and abroad in the future. Therefore, the fact that two out of five informants hope their children will be able to compete on the global stage through an exchange program and study abroad supports the idea that English is an educational and socioeconomic investment meant to improve their children's future social and economic mobility.

Discussions

The results showed that the parents in Probolinggo concur that teaching English at an early age is essential. At a time when studying English is crucial for enhancing language skills, increasing self-worth, and obtaining a competitive advantage in international employment and educational markets. Parents are totally convinced of it. Research by Deswita et al. (2023) claims that parents' belief that the English language will become a commodity in the future is consistent with earlier research findings.

The discussion, which consisted of statements and questions, showed that parents in Probolinggo agreed that studying English in early childhood is crucial. Five parents, plus one supporting informant, have a 4-year-old child, and they also support the statement that children who learn English at an early age, as soon as possible, will be better prepared for the next stages. These results are consistent with the view of informants expressed by M1,

“I am very sure that children will be more prepared and more confident when they take English lessons at primary school or in the next levels.” (M1, 2026).

Similarly, M2 emphasized the following belief:

“English language skills are very important for the long term. Children not only become more confident but also better prepared for an international environment. And I want my son to speak English fluently someday.” (M2, 2026).

This finding shows that parents in Probolinggo believe teaching English to their children at a young age will benefit them in this globalized society. This view aligns with the parents in Probolinggo's belief in the benefits of having their children become fluent in English.

Without parents continuing to assist their children at home, these expectations can come true. Mothers, in particular, play a significant role as role models in the family. She determines whether the family influences their children's education. Mother also influences the children's academic achievement. Before entering kindergarten, children should receive the majority of their early education from their families (Magnuson, 2007; Rodriguez & Tamis-LeMonda, 2011). Reese points out that the quality of conversation between mothers and their children aged 3 to 4 can have a strong effect on their speaking and literacy skills. Children can explain something before they enter first grade. Children who can lead conversations like that are more likely to be great tellers, even in kindergarten (Bingham, 2007; Haden et al., 1997; Hamilton et al., 2021).

The results show that parents in Probolinggo recognized the importance of learning English in childhood. All informants agreed that they were taking English lessons at home with their children to develop their language skills and critical thinking. In reality, they must understand what their children need and ensure that their methods are appropriate to their children's developmental stage. One of the parents stated that children should receive great support from their parents not only in English lessons, but also in other subjects such as mathematics, science, and history (P1, 2026). We can see and say that Probolinggo parents are aware of their role within the family. Researchers have found that this awareness is not only dependent on natural factors but is also closely linked to the parents' level of education. The parents' own life experiences significantly influence the way they raise their children. The crucial role parents play in child-rearing shapes their children's development and character. The quality of the upbringing process varies depending on the parents' own life experiences.

Parents' expectations for their children's futures are also shaped by their understanding of their role in the family. In addition to supporting their children's current academic endeavors, parents expect that teaching English to their children at a young age will create more opportunities for future employment and higher education. Some informants believe that if their children learn English well, they will be able to enter elite schools. In contrast, others believe that English will be a valuable skill in an increasingly competitive job market. International scholarship will be available too. These projections demonstrate that parents view English as a long-term investment in their child's future academic and professional success.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The research findings and conversations indicate that parents in Probolinggo have a very positive view of teaching English in early childhood. They argue that teaching young children is essential for preparing them for future academic and international contests, as well as for laying a foundation for language competency and improving their self-esteem, rather than being seen as an additional topic. English is seen as a life skill and a competitive edge that improves children's education and future careers.

This study demonstrates the crucial role parents play in helping their children learn English at home. Parents promote children's continuous practice by acting as role models and motivators, helping with homework and providing basic learning materials, and using English in everyday interactions. This involvement is consistent with theoretical results showing that the quality of early parent-child contact strongly influences children's language and personality development. Parents' understanding of their position and responsibilities within the family, influenced by their educational background and the parenting methods they have encountered, has a major impact on the quality of this assistance.

The socioeconomic conditions in Probolinggo, such as a lack of job opportunities, are closely related to parents' aspirations for their children's future. Parents believe that English proficiency is a long-term investment that can lead to better education and opportunities for study abroad, student exchange programs, and jobs requiring foreign-language fluency. Families are very important to the success of early English learning, and parents' active involvement at home also reflects their high hopes for their children's academic and economic mobility.

The researchers advise readers to improve their English proficiency. Learning a foreign language, especially English, is essential for personal achievement, particularly for boosting social interaction across a variety of contexts, including the global community.

For social contact and communication, language is an essential tool. Without language, social interaction is impossible. English must be undervalued. If you have not started learning English at a young age, you must do it right away. Parental support and encouragement are essential for children's growth, especially in early vocabulary development, as parents are familiar with these terms. Children can use them with confidence in conversation.

The researchers hope readers will see how important it is for parents to start teaching their children English from a young age, with sufficient vocabulary so that they can speak effectively in the future.

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