

# ***Reveal: Perception and Urgency of Children's English in Kota Bertuah***

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**Abstract.** Early childhood education should be prepared in a planned and guided manner as a basis for optimizing their language development, including second language namely English. The paper aims to seek out the perceptions of parents about learning English at early childhood education (ECE) institutions and the urgency for children in Kota Bertuah. This research was involving six parents who enrolled their children in ECE institutions with an English program. Data collect used an open interview instrument. Analysis began with making transcripts of the interview, then by coding to find core and sub-core on the perception and urgency of learning English for young children. From research investigations, it can be concluded that the Parents' perceptions are positive towards English language learning at ECE Institutions in Kota Bertuah because English is presented through fun activities, plus positive responses from children who appear in stories and habits carried out by children outside the school environment. Furthermore, the urgency of English in early childhood in Kota Bertuah is that language is easier to introduce to children during their golden years. Furthermore, the findings obtained are the urgency of learning English for early childhood, namely providing a school environment that can stimulate children's sensitivity to hearing and speaking using English vocabulary, even though they are not directly fluent in communicating like native speakers. The implications of the research results are the existence of a special English language learning model or guide that is in accordance with the characteristics and development of early childhood.

**Keywords:** Perceptions, Urgency, Children's English, Kota Bertuah

## **1 Introduction**

Early childhood education is oriented towards optimizing the growth and development of children aged 0-6 years through a series of play and learn activities. The early phase of a child's growth and development is considered the right time for providing stimulation, with the hope of offering ample opportunities for children to express themselves and learn language. Montessori (1991) states that the early years encompass the age range of 0-7 years, which is a sensitive period for language acquisition in humans. This viewpoint is supported by research findings that indicate [1] the efficient periods for language development in children are referred to as critical periods, and these include the baby and early childhood years. Among these periods, language skills develop in tandem with growth. In line with this, [2] it is emphasized that early English language education is a suitable approach. The introduction of foreign language learning at an early age is expected to yield better linguistic outcomes. Furthermore, English should ideally be taught from the first day of school because the younger

the child, the greater the likelihood of mastering the language [3]. Moreover, [4] in the Critical Period Hypothesis, it is posited that the appropriate age for learning a foreign language is during the first ten years, as during this period, the human brain reaches a high degree of flexibility. During puberty, the brain loses its flexibility, resulting in the difficulty of learning a foreign language. English language learning is based on the idea that learning a foreign language is best started as early as possible. As supported by research findings [5], the main conclusion shows the advantages of second language (L2) acquisition in children compared to adults, such as the performance of L2 whose initial age is over 7 years old never follows the patterns of native English speakers. Therefore, early childhood education institutions should be carefully planned as a foundation for optimizing language development in children, including a second language like English. The ultimate goal is to prepare them to face a continuously evolving world in the future.

Noam Chomsky believes that every child possesses a genetically inherited language talent; we are born with an innate predisposition for language learning. The core of Chomsky's theory on language acquisition asserts that humans are pre-equipped to learn language and, in fact, are born with a complete set of fundamental language rules. Through activities and social interactions, an individual's language talent is shaped and developed. Chomsky states that infants are born with a universal linguistic understanding common to all languages, which will later help them acquire specific language skills from their environment [7]. The process of language learning occurs gradually. A child's speech also evolves with their age, experiencing language development through various stages. Noam Chomsky states that children are equipped with a set of tools that allow them to acquire language. This tool is the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), which enables them to systematically observe the language in their surroundings, structure it, and internalize language patterns. Language learning occurs during the period when a child's cognitive development reaches a point where they use and manipulate symbols. The second phase of cognitive development is the preoperational stage, which begins around the age of two to seven years. Socio-psychologically, young children enjoy ten advantageous conditions for language learning, while older individuals only experience a few critical periods for language acquisition [8]. During this phase, children begin to describe the world with words, visuals, and images.

The reality is that second language learning is an intentional process that takes place in both formal and informal environments. Learning English as a second language for young children is a dynamic endeavor, and it can be expected to undergo constant change. English is an intriguing topic for researchers in various countries. Many countries adopt English as a second language. Research and discussions regarding teaching English to young children have rapidly evolved in recent years, as seen in the increasing number of young children learning English globally [9]. This also reinforces the idea [10] That every child has an internal drive to learn a foreign language, and it's the teacher's duty to nurture this drive. There are several reasons for teaching English at the elementary level, as follows: the most advantageous phase for linguistic development, establishing a strong foundation for further education; starting earlier provides more learning time; from an early age, children are introduced to the cultures of other countries; they will grow with a tolerant and sympathetic attitude; besides its practical value, foreign language learning can stimulate proficiency in the native language; and it can enhance memory, thinking, perspective, imagination, and more.

Some fundamental points are as follows: the most advantageous period for linguistic development can be utilized to establish a strong foundation for further linguistic education; starting earlier provides more time for learning English as a foreign language – the earlier you start, the more time you have; children who learn a foreign language initially at the preschool

or elementary level have a greater opportunity to learn a second foreign language in secondary school; from an early age, children are introduced to the cultures of the countries where the target language is used; they will grow to have a tolerant and sympathetic attitude; learning a foreign language at an early age, besides having practical value, also stimulates a child's ability to use their native language more effectively; learning a language enhances memory, thinking, perception, imagination, etc. [11]. Furthermore, the fact is that English is a unifying force among nations on the international stage. English has also become the dominant language in the era of global communication. It can be assumed that English language proficiency is a crucial necessity, facilitating communication both at the national and international levels, including the Malay community in Pekanbaru, the City of Prosperity.

The state of the community regarding foreign language proficiency is such that parents are competing to enroll their children in institutions that teach English as one of the skills developed from a young age. As a result of recent observations, English appears to be the leading program at ECE institutions in the Kota Bertuah. It seems to be a favorite program that is used as an attraction for certain institutions to attract parents in this ever-developing era. It is known that several ECE units specifically provide English language learning with larger portions with English language familiarization in each activity. However, other ECE units only use English as an additional activity for children, namely by specializing in the use of English on certain days. This indicates the proliferation of superior English language programs at ECE institutions in Kota Bertuah. With the boom in this superior program, there are parents who are tempted, so many of them register and enroll their children in this school. Considering the intensity of the above phenomenon, it is necessary to carry out an analysis to reveal how parents perceive English language learning at ECE Institutions in Kota Bertuah, and what the urgency is for young children.

## **2 Materials and Methods**

This research is a qualitative study aimed at understanding parents' perceptions of English language learning at Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions and the importance of early English language learning in the city of Bertuah. The research was conducted over four months, involving parents who enrolled their children in ECE institutions with English language programs. Parents filled out a consent form indicating their willingness to participate in the study before the interviews were conducted. Afterward, parents completed a member check to ensure the data's validity. The participants in this study are parents who registered their children in ECE institutions with English language programs. There were a total of 6 participants, who were subsequently assigned codes A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, and A6, with the coding aimed at facilitating the data analysis process during the research interviews. Data collection was carried out using an open-ended interview instrument, with each interview lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes. The interview process was conducted in person at participants' homes or at school, with video and audio recording documentation. The first step in data analysis involved transcribing the interview results, followed by coding to identify the core and sub-core perceptions and the importance of early English language learning in the city of Bertuah. The research analysis used a taxonomy.

### 3 Results and Discussion

Participants in this research consisted of six parents who registered their children at a ECE institution with an English language program. Each participant has the following characteristics:

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Participants	Frequency (n=6)	Percentage (%)
Parental Age		
< 40 years	5	83.33%
> 40 years	1	16.66%
Education		
S1/S2	3	50.00%
High school/equivalent	3	50.00%
Activity		
Work	6	100.00%
Doesn't work	-	-

Based on the table above, it can be seen that parents who register their children at ECE institutions with English language programs are more likely to be under 40 years old, with work activities and educational backgrounds of high school or equivalent as much as 50% and S1/S2 by 50%. Furthermore, the discussion in this research is divided into two, namely, as follows:

#### 3.1 Parents' perceptions about learning English at ECE Institutions in Kota Bertuah

As a result of initial observations, information was obtained that English language learning is carried out every day in learning at ECE institutions. English is taught from morning until home time. However, the implementation process is still with the help of Indonesian. This is done so that children have the opportunity to understand what the teacher is saying, but still get used to hearing English. Usually, teachers introduce English vocabulary through pictures, songs and games that are adapted to the learning theme at ECE institutions. Furthermore, in this ECE institution with a superior English language program, parents register their children with the perception that learning is carried out in a fun way. According to him, children like the English learning activities provided by the ECE Institute because they are taught with joy and a cheerful atmosphere. As stated:

*"Sometimes he sings songs in English at home." (A2)*

*"My child is enthusiastic." (A4)*

*"He told me that yesterday he played guessing pictures in English, at that time it was about body parts." (A6)*

Children's interest in learning English is increasing with the support of teachers in the classroom. The strategies and methods used by teachers impress children. Teachers play a big

role in preparing meaningful learning for young children. Teachers must prepare more types of exercises and support activities to help students become more interested in learning and learn English more effectively [12]. The child's happy feelings will be passed on to the parents. So parents are more confident that they have made the right decision for their child. Fun learning does not make children feel burdened by learning English. The research results stated that students largely agreed and expressed positive attitudes, personal feelings, and perspectives toward vocabulary learning by listening to English songs [13]. In line with that, the research results [14] that thanks to joyful lectures, students are not only happier, but they also remember more information. Students who feel happy and not stressed during learning will be able to follow the learning process well. Even the fun that students have can help them to improve their learning outcomes. The interview results show that parents' perceptions about English language learning at school are presented through interesting activities that suit the needs and characteristics of young children. Children have also expressed their feelings of joy to their parents, as follows:

"We were singing together earlier." (A1)

*"Don't be late, mother, tomorrow we will play one-two-three clap."* (A3)

*"My little brother was happy because he guessed the picture correctly, and the teacher said it was good."*(A5)

Based on the results of the interview above, it can be seen that parents have a positive perception of early childhood English learning at ECE Institutions in Kota Bertuah. This is because the response from children is also very good to the activities carried out.

### **3.2.1 The Urgency of Early Childhood English Language Learning in Kota Bertuah**

Learning English for early childhood is not mandatory and is only an option for parents. Even if you look at the existing curriculum in Indonesia, namely the Merdeka Curriculum, there are no learning outcomes specifically for English in the early childhood phase. However, the reality in the field is like walking across the street, ECE institutions continue to provide English learning menus, teachers introduce children to English vocabulary. In fact, it becomes something that is considered superior when children enter a ECE institution with an English language program. Furthermore, every parent who registers their child in this program certainly has their own reasons, especially in this Kota Bertuah which is rich in culture and very close to a religious atmosphere. Parents register their children, so that children in their golden years are accustomed to an environment where they communicate using simple English from an early age. Apart from getting children used to hearing and speaking simple English, parents also prepare children for a better life in the future. As stated, among other things:

"Five years old children find it easier to learn English" (A1)

"The important thing is to get used to listening to English first" (A3)

*"My child often repeats English at home, good morning he says when he wakes up"* (A4)

*"His memory is very good, even though he is not immediately clever, he remembers some English vocabulary"* (A5).

*"I'm proud, Kevin said ket when he saw the words "Cat" on the way." (A6)*

Parents also assume that knowing English from an early age will be more optimal than as an adult, because brain development is growing rapidly. Preschool children will find it easier to remember new vocabulary. This is in line with opinion[15]that Typically, second-language learning becomes more difficult for the 15- or 20 – years – old than 5 – or 10 – years old. Not much different from the research results [16] that The results of interviews with a sample of 300 mothers representing all segments of society showed that 70% of the mothers believed that the best age to teach children English was between four and five years old. Furthermore,[17]reveals the importance of early language learning has been specified by the European Commission's (EC) Action Plan 2004-2006 which recommends learning one foreign language (FL) from an early age and the introduction of a second FL by the end of primary school. The goals of the EC are directed at creating a multilingual Europe, with citizens who are able to understand each other and form educational and work-related connections across borders. Something similar was also expressed [18] that Parents' overenthusiasm to promote English in schools stems from their perceptions about the high value of English, global aspirations and their belief in the popular axiom 'the younger the better'. Furthermore, other research results also reveal parents' perceptions that children will be better English learners and L2 speakers when they start any foreign language at an early age [19].

Through interviews, it is known that parents want their children, apart from being religious and having noble morals, to also be able to compete in the era of digitalization by mastering an international language as a language commonly used in public places encountered in everyday life, namely English. This also influences the development of Kota Pekanbaru, more and more malls, shops and children's play areas are being built. So children often find instructions/signs in English. As stated:

*"It is important to train children's sensitivity in the English words they see and hear in everyday life" (A2)*

*"English is very commonly used, in public places such as malls, so at least children know simple information such as close, open, exit, etc." (A3)*

*"To operate a computer you also have to understand English, right" (A6)*

Furthermore, based on the responses of parents who register their children at an institution with a superior English language program, it is not for the child to become fluent in English but rather for the child to get used to an environment that stimulates sensitivity to hearing and speaking using English from an early age, especially in their golden years. The same thing was also revealed through research results [20] that If children hear English spoken around them, they will learn to discriminate among those sounds that make a difference in the meaning of English words (the phonemes), and they will learn to ignore those that do not. This is the reason why many parents prefer ECE institutions with excellent English language programs. Similar things are also found in research results that 70% prefer to enroll their children in a kindergarten that teaches English [16]. Furthermore, early knowledge of English also supports children to be better prepared for the era of digitalization in their daily lives.

## 4 Conclusion

Parents' perceptions are positive towards English language learning at ECE institutions in Kota Bertuah because English is presented through fun activities, plus positive responses from children which can be seen in the stories and habits carried out by children outside the school environment. Furthermore, the urgency of English in early childhood in Kota Bertuah is that the language is easier to introduce to children during their golden age. Apart from that, parents want their children to not only be religious and have noble morals, but also be able to compete in the era of digitalization by mastering English as an international language that dominates almost all aspects of life. Furthermore, the findings obtained are the urgency of learning English for early childhood which provides a school environment that can stimulate children's sensitivity to hearing and speaking using English vocabulary, even if they are not directly fluent in native speaker communication.

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