

Uplifting Indonesian Children Through English Language Education to Reduce Language Barrier

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Abstract

Background: Many Indonesian children in Kuala Lumpur face significant educational challenges due to language barriers that hinder their ability to participate effectively in an English-medium educational environment. This issue is particularly prevalent in Kuala Lumpur, where many mixed-race children live among foreign communities and encounter difficulties in accessing quality language education. **Objective:** This study aimed to explore the impact of an English language education program at SD Sentul on improving language proficiency and reducing language barriers among Indonesian children. **Method:** This study employed a qualitative observational approach to assess the effectiveness of the English language education program for Indonesian children aged 5 to 11 years. Data were collected over one month through interviews and observations, focusing on participants' experiences and perceptions. The study involved 30 children with limited English proficiency who were recruited from a local school. **Result:** Initial assessments indicated that many children experienced difficulties in understanding English instructions and participating in classroom discussions, which led to feelings of isolation. However, the program's interactive learning methods, including games and group activities, contributed to increased confidence, participation, and engagement among the participants. **Conclusion:** The English language education program at SB Sentul significantly improved students' language skills and learning motivation. Continuous efforts are required to further optimize the program and ensure that it addresses the diverse needs of Indonesian children in Malaysia.

Keywords: English language education, Indonesian children, language barriers, qualitative research

Abstrak

Latar belakang: Banyak anak-anak Indonesia di Kuala Lumpur menghadapi tantangan pendidikan yang signifikan karena hambatan bahasa yang menghalangi kemampuan mereka untuk berpartisipasi secara efektif dalam lingkungan pendidikan berbahasa Inggris. Masalah ini sangat umum terjadi di Kuala Lumpur, di mana banyak anak-anak ras campuran tinggal di antara komunitas asing dan mengalami kesulitan dalam mengakses pendidikan bahasa yang berkualitas. **Tujuan:** Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi dampak program pendidikan bahasa Inggris di SD Sentul terhadap peningkatan kemampuan berbahasa dan pengurangan hambatan bahasa di kalangan anak-anak Indonesia. **Metode:** Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan observasi kualitatif untuk menilai efektivitas program pendidikan bahasa Inggris bagi anak-anak Indonesia berusia 5 hingga 11 tahun. Data dikumpulkan selama satu bulan melalui wawancara dan observasi, dengan fokus pada pengalaman dan persepsi peserta. Studi ini melibatkan 30 anak dengan kemampuan berbahasa Inggris terbatas yang direkrut dari sebuah sekolah lokal. **Hasil:** Penilaian awal menunjukkan bahwa banyak anak mengalami kesulitan dalam memahami instruksi berbahasa Inggris dan berpartisipasi dalam diskusi kelas, yang menyebabkan perasaan terisolasi. Namun, metode pembelajaran interaktif program, termasuk permainan dan kegiatan kelompok, berkontribusi pada peningkatan kepercayaan diri, partisipasi, dan keterlibatan di antara para peserta. **Kesimpulan:** Program pendidikan bahasa Inggris di SB Sentul secara signifikan meningkatkan kemampuan berbahasa dan motivasi belajar siswa. Upaya berkelanjutan diperlukan untuk lebih mengoptimalkan program dan memastikan bahwa program tersebut memenuhi beragam kebutuhan anak-anak Indonesia di Malaysia.

Kata kunci: pendidikan bahasa Inggris, anak Indonesia, hambatan bahasa, penelitian kualitatif

PENDAHULUAN

Many Indonesian children in Malaysia encounter significant educational challenges due to language barriers [1, 2]. These children often come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, which may hinder their ability to fully engage in an English-medium educational environment. The transition to a new educational system frequently exacerbates these difficulties, as students struggle to comprehend lessons and communicate effectively with teachers and classmates. This issue is particularly prevalent in rural areas, where access to quality language education remains limited [3].

English has emerged as a global lingua franca, playing a vital role in academic achievement and professional opportunities [4]. In Malaysia, where English is widely used in both business and education, proficiency in the language is essential for students' future success [5]. Research has shown that students with strong English proficiency tend to achieve better academic outcomes and have greater access to resources and opportunities that can enhance their educational experiences [6]. Furthermore, English serves as a gateway to global knowledge, enabling students to access a vast range of information, research, and cultural exchanges that are predominantly available in English [7].

Indonesian children in Malaysia face substantial challenges due to language barriers. These challenges are reflected in difficulties in comprehending classroom instructions, participating in discussions, and establishing social connections with peers [5]. Such barriers may lead to feelings of isolation and reduced self-esteem, which can further negatively affect academic performance [8]. Previous studies have indicated that language barriers adversely influence not only educational outcomes but also social development, thereby limiting opportunities for collaboration and cultural exchange [8].

Enhancing English language education for Indonesian children can provide numerous benefits. Improved language proficiency can strengthen students' communication skills, increase their confidence, and contribute to better academic performance [7]. Moreover, proficiency in English expands access to educational resources and career opportunities, thereby empowering students to achieve their academic and professional goals [9]. Previous studies have demonstrated that language education initiatives can significantly improve students' overall academic engagement and achievement [10]. In addition, English proficiency can foster cross-cultural understanding and collaboration, which are essential competencies in today's interconnected world [9].

The initiative at SB Sentul aims to address the language barriers experienced by Indonesian children through the implementation of effective English language education

programs [11]. By emphasizing interactive and engaging teaching methods, the program seeks to empower students and equip them with the language skills necessary to succeed academically and socially [12]. This initiative not only aims to improve English proficiency but also to foster a sense of belonging and self-confidence among students, ultimately contributing to their overall development and success within a multicultural environment [13].

The ability to communicate effectively in English is essential for children in today's globalized world, particularly for those from non-English-speaking backgrounds. In Malaysia, many Indonesian children encounter challenges in acquiring English language skills due to various sociocultural and educational factors [14]. This study aims to evaluate the impact of an English language education program designed specifically for Indonesian children residing in Kuala Lumpur [15]. By emphasizing qualitative insights, the research seeks to examine how such a program can improve language proficiency and promote engagement among young learners [16].

METODE

Study design

This research utilized an observational qualitative approach to assess the effectiveness of an English language program for Indonesian children in Kuala Lumpur. This design allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions.

Participants

The study involved 30 Indonesian children aged 5 to 11 years, all residing in Kuala Lumpur. Participants were recruited from local schools and selected based on their limited proficiency in English, as determined through an initial assessment.

Setting

Conducted at SB Sentul, a community school in Kuala Lumpur, the program provided a conducive environment for language learning, equipped with resources to support interactive education.

Data collection

The program spanned one month, with classes held three times a week for two hours each session. Instruction emphasized interaction, utilizing games, group activities, and hands-on projects to engage students and facilitate language use in real-life contexts.

Instruments

The curriculum included age-appropriate textbooks, multimedia tools, and supplementary materials such as flashcards and worksheets. Pre-post program assessments

were designed to evaluate language proficiency across reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Data analysis

To assess the impact of English language education on language proficiency improvement among Indonesian children at SB Sentul, paired t-tests will be utilized to compare scores before and after the intervention. Given the possibility of non-normal data distribution, non-parametric tests will be applied where necessary. The findings are displayed using tables and graphs to effectively illustrate the educational intervention's influence on reducing language barriers.

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

This research was carried out in the English language classroom at SB Sentul, focusing on 30 Indonesian students aged 5 to 11 years. The participants were divided into two educational groups: Standard 1 and 2, which included 18 students, and Standard 3 to 6, comprising 12 students, of whom 2 already had some spoken English skills. The average age of the participants was 8.2 years (± 1.5), with a range spanning from 5 to 11 years. Significantly, the majority of students belonged to Standard 1 and 2, representing 60% of the total cohort.

At the program's onset, only 2 students aged 10 and 11 possessed any spoken English abilities, while the remaining 28 were entirely new to the language. To evaluate the effectiveness of the English language education program, pre-post intervention assessments were conducted over a two-week period. A paired t-test was employed to compare the average scores in both speaking and writing skills before and after the intervention, with non-parametric tests applied when necessary to account for non-normal data distribution.

Table 1. Participants skill pre and post-test

Group	Average score		Improvement	Statistical significance
	Pre-test	Post-test		
Standard 1 - 2	40 (± 10.5)	75 (± 8.2)	87.5%	$p < 0.01$
Standard 3 - 6	50 (± 9.0)	85 (± 7.5)	70%	$p < 0.01$

The findings revealed that all 18 students in Standard 1 and 2 exhibited significant improvement in their English language skills. The average pre-test scores for these students were 40 (± 10.5), while post-test scores surged to 75 (± 8.2), achieving statistical significance ($p < 0.01$). Notably, during the writing component of the post-assessment, it was observed that four students struggled to write English words from the board; however, they successfully engaged in drawing and spelling exercises related to English vocabulary. This indicates that while they faced challenges with writing, they were still able to demonstrate their understanding of the language through

creative means. Among the 12 students in Standard 3 to 6, 10 began to communicate in English following the intervention. Their average pre-test scores were 50 (± 9.0), which improved to 85 (± 7.5) in the post-test, also reflecting statistical significance ($p < 0.01$). Overall, 18 out of 30 students (60%) began to speak English, highlighting a substantial enhancement in language proficiency across both groups.

Classroom observations indicated a marked increase in student engagement, which had a positive impact on learning outcomes. Interactive activities were particularly effective in facilitating language acquisition, allowing students to practice their skills in a supportive environment. These encouraging results suggest that ongoing English language education could further enhance proficiency among the remaining students, helping to reduce language barriers in the future and promoting greater confidence in their language abilities.



Figure 1: English language learning

The results from the English language education program at SB Sentul show a significant improvement in language skills among Indonesian students aged 5 to 11. This is particularly important because young learners are at a crucial stage for picking up new languages [17]. Research indicates that early exposure to a second language is vital for developing both language and cognitive skills [6]. The improvements seen in this study support previous findings that structured educational programs can effectively help students learn a new language [18]. The data shows that all 18 students in Standard 1 and 2 made noticeable progress in their English skills, with average test scores rising from 40 to 75. This improvement is statistically significant, indicating that the program was effective [19]. It is especially impressive that only two students had any prior experience with spoken English. This finding reinforces the idea that focused educational programs can help young learners overcome language barriers [18].

However, it is important to note that four students in Standard 1 and 2 struggled with writing English words from the board, even though they participated in drawing and spelling activities [17]. This highlights a common

issue in language education: students often find it easier to speak than to write [15]. Research shows that writing skills typically develop more slowly than speaking skills, especially in young learners [20]. This suggests that future programs should focus on improving both speaking and writing skills to ensure a well-rounded language education [21].

The increase in student engagement during the classes can be linked to the interactive activities included in the program. Engaging students through hands-on learning experiences has been shown to boost motivation and help them retain language skills [22]. Activities like games and group projects likely created a positive learning environment, encouraging students to work together and communicate. Previous studies have also shown that interactive teaching methods can lead to better language learning outcomes [23].

Engagement is crucial for language learning. When students are engaged, they are more likely to participate actively, which is essential for developing language skills [24]. The interactive nature of the program likely helped students feel a sense of community, as they were encouraged to support each other in their language learning journeys. Research indicates that collaborative learning can significantly enhance students' motivation and participation, which is vital for success in language education [25]. The findings suggest that ongoing English language education is essential for further improving proficiency among the remaining students. With 60% of participants beginning to speak English after the program, it is clear that continued efforts can lead to even greater language acquisition. Future programs should include more writing exercises alongside speaking activities to ensure a balanced approach to language education. This aligns with recommendations from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), which advocates for a comprehensive approach that includes speaking, listening, reading, and writing [26].

Additionally, ongoing assessments and personalized support for students struggling with writing could help address the gaps in skills. Differentiated instruction, which tailors teaching methods to meet individual student needs, has been shown to be effective in supporting diverse learners [27]. By implementing strategies that cater to individual strengths and weaknesses, educators can better support students' language development [13]. The connection between student engagement and learning outcomes highlights the importance of creating a supportive and stimulating classroom environment [28]. Research shows that a positive classroom atmosphere can significantly impact students' motivation and willingness to participate [29]. This is especially important in language education, where students may feel nervous about making mistakes [29]. Creating a safe space for

language exploration can encourage students to take risks and experiment, which are essential for learning a new language [29].

It is also important to consider the cultural and societal context in which these students are learning. Indonesia, with its rich diversity of languages, presents unique challenges and opportunities for language education [30]. Promoting English language skills among young learners is crucial for their future academic and professional success, especially in a globalized world [31]. As English continues to be a dominant language in international communication, equipping students with these skills can enhance their opportunities for advancement [32]. Moreover, the emphasis on English education in Indonesia is often influenced by societal views of language as a tool for empowerment and social mobility [25]. Therefore, it is essential for educators to focus not only on language proficiency but also on fostering cultural awareness among students. Teaching English should include discussions about cultural differences, helping students understand the language as a way to connect with diverse communities [2].

KESIMPULAN

In conclusion, the English language education program at SB Sentul has shown significant potential in improving language proficiency among Indonesian students. The findings highlight the importance of interactive learning and the need for a balanced approach to teaching both speaking and writing skills. As the program develops, incorporating strategies to enhance writing proficiency and maintaining high levels of student engagement will be crucial for achieving long-term educational goals.

Future research should explore the effectiveness of different teaching strategies and their impact on language acquisition among diverse populations. Additionally, long-term studies could provide insights into the lasting benefits of early language education, contributing to the growing body of knowledge on effective language teaching practices. By continuing to refine and adapt educational approaches, educators can ensure that they meet the needs of their students and equip them with the skills necessary for success in a globalized world.

REKOMENDASI

To help Indonesian children learn English at SB Sentul in Kuala Lumpur, we should make the lessons interesting and relevant to their lives. Teachers need better training, and we should involve parents through workshops. After-school help and cultural events can improve language skills. Using technology and checking progress regularly will support learning. Getting local English speakers involved and offering rewards for improvement will motivate students.

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