



# Empowering Early Educators through Community-Based Training: Enhancing English Proficiency for Playgroup and Kindergarten Teachers

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history

Received: 16 Nov 2024

Accepted: 18 Nov 2024

Published: 31 Dec 2024

### Kata kunci:

Guru TK;  
Kemahiran Bahasa  
inggris;  
Pendidik Usia Dini;  
Pengabdian  
Masyarakat

### Keywords:

Community Service;  
Early Educators;  
English Proficiency;  
Kindergarten Teachers

## ABSTRAK

**Background:** Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris di pendidikan anak usia dini semakin berkembang, namun guru menghadapi tantangan seperti keterbatasan kemahiran dan kurangnya kepercayaan diri. Oleh karena itu, pengabdian masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk memberdayakan guru kelompok bermain dan TK agar lebih percaya diri dan kompeten dalam menggunakan Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa pengantar di kelas. **Metode:** Partisipan dalam penelitian ini adalah 32 guru kelompok bermain dan taman kanak-kanak dari sebuah sekolah swasta di Surakarta, Jawa Tengah, Indonesia. Kegiatan pengabdian masyarakat ini terdiri dari beberapa tahapan, seperti analisis kebutuhan guru, elisitasi rancangan materi, lokakarya, dan evaluasi. **Hasil:** Setelah mengikuti kegiatan pengabdian ini, para guru merasakan manfaat lokakarya, dengan peningkatan kepercayaan diri dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris dan pemahaman yang lebih baik terhadap materi karena relevansi dengan praktik mengajar mereka. Selain itu, interaksi aktif dan kerja sama dalam diskusi kelompok meningkatkan keterampilan serta kesiapan mereka dalam menerapkan bahasa Inggris di kelas. **Kesimpulan:** Para guru menghargai pendekatan praktis dan penerapan langsungnya pada kebutuhan pengajaran mereka.

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** English language teaching in early childhood education is growing, but teachers face challenges such as limited proficiency and a lack of confidence. Therefore, this community service aims to empower playgroup and kindergarten teachers to be more confident and competent in using English as the language of instruction in the classroom. **Method:** Participants in this study were 32 playgroup and kindergarten teachers from a private school in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia. The community service activities consisted of several stages, including teacher needs analysis, material design elicitation, workshops, and evaluation. **Results:** After participating in the activities, the teachers experienced the benefits of the workshops, including increased confidence in speaking English and a better understanding of the material due to its relevance to their teaching practices. Additionally, active interaction and collaboration in group discussions enhanced their skills and preparedness to implement English in the classroom. **Conclusion:** The teachers appreciated the practical approach and its direct application to their teaching needs.



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## INTRODUCTION

In the ongoing dynamics of globalization, there has been a significant shift in the English education landscape, particularly in early childhood education (Jenkins, 2007; Stelma & Kostoulas, 2021). In response to current shifts regarding the position of English as a global language, teaching English in the early education setting has grown popular among public and scholars (Adamson, 2010; Alenezi, Ihmeideh & Alshaboul, 2022; Brown & Englehardt, 2016; Goble et al., 2015). The common usage of English as a worldwide communication strategy drives parents' desire to prepare ways for their children to be capable of using English since childhood (Nafissi & Shafiee, 2020). Parents have begun to place a greater emphasis on early children's English instruction. Early childhood education is an integral setting to help kids enhance their language learning trajectory (Heckman, 2006; Hoff, 2013). The language atmosphere encountered in early childhood education programmes plays an important role in promoting children's oral language abilities; hence, regular communication with teachers and classmates allows children to grasp new terms and improve their understanding of syntactic structure (Whorral & Cabell, 2016). During the preschool period, it is critical to understand how preschool teachers can foster these capabilities as they hold a crucial position in the EFL/ESL learners' language acquisition and success levels (Tong et al, 2017). This concern puts demands on early childhood teachers to be capable in using English in their teaching-learning process and continuously improve their English skills.

As the popularity of early children English learning evolves, challenges concerning its implementation have emerged. Rixon (2015) further highlights teachers' important role in creating optimal circumstances for language acquisition, particularly in EFL context where students have little interaction with English outside of school. Playgroup and kindergarten teachers, who were originally recruited without the expectation of teaching English, now face increasing demands to use English language instruction into their classrooms. This sudden changing requirement has highlighted a critical gap. Many of these educators lack even basic proficiency in English, leading to a profound lack of confidence to deliver their materials in English. Many of these educators have limited or no proficiency in the English Language. A previous study also reported that kindergarten teachers faced several challenges related to a lack of preparation in dealing with kindergarten children's needs and also the desire for a professional development training program to help them in coping their challenges in teaching English to preschool and kindergarten students (Hegde, Hewett & Terrell, 2016). Recent curricula changes and parental expectations have introduced a new mandate to use English as a medium in their classrooms. The quality of teachers' English language instruction cannot be guaranteed, therefore comprehensive English teaching has become more paramount (Hu et al., 2016).

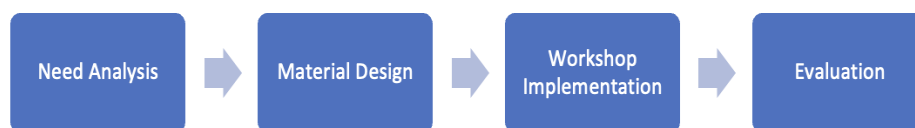
The demand for good-quality English language and emerging literacy lessons in early childhood education has been widely understood. Following Lesaux and Gamez (2012), the frequency of teachers' conversation and the linguistic setting that children receive exposure to in early childhood education classrooms, have significant effects on the the growth of English language and literacy of their students. Thus, early childhood teachers' English language ability plays a pivotal role in the early childhood education. However, relatively little study of community service is known on English training for early childhood education teachers in

Indonesia. Taken together, a community service workshop that can support teachers' English teaching in kindergaten is needed for this study to consider.

This study seeks to address the following research question: How can a targeted English language training workshop improve the proficiency and teaching confidence of playgroup and kindergarten teachers? Guided by the aforementioned background, this community service aims to enhance English language proficiency of playgroup and kindergarten teachers enabling them to understand and use English effectively in classroom settings. Furthermore, it also aims to build teaching confidence of playgroup and kindergarten teachers in their ability to teach in English, ensuring they feel competent and comfortable integrating English instruction into their daily routines.

## METHOD

The community service activity conducted in this study was in the form of workshop. The participants which become the target community in this paper are 32 playgroup and kindergarten teachers at a private school in Surakarta. The activity was carried out in several stages as illustrated in [Figure 1](#). First, the trainer did needs analysis process by conducting pre-test and interviews. The pre-test was in the form of a standardized TOEFL English Proficiency Test, which covered listening skills, grammar and writing skills, and reading skills. The pre-test was used to determine the teachers' proficiency level in English. After we obtained the results of the pre-test, the trainer conducted an unstructured interview with the teachers related to their needs and their test results. The interviews here were conducted as a follow-up to identify the teachers' weaknesses and needs in English. After finding and analysing their needs and problems, the next step was designing and planning the workshop. The material was made based on teachers' needs, material-designed elicitation, teachers' language practice, teachers' micro teaching and feedback discussions. Thirdly, the workshop was carried out using the material made in the second step. Thirty-two teachers who came from different educational background had participated in the workshop. The workshop was conducted for two days at a private school in Surakarta. The workshop were divided into eight sessions. All of the sessions material were delivered in English and Indonesia as we considered the teachers' competency in English. At the final step, the trainer did the evaluation process through reflection and semi-structured interviews. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically. It involved exploring themes that comes from the data and the process was done through thorough reading and transcribing data. This process requires thorough examination by repeatedly reading the transcribed data ([King, 2004](#)). Thematic analysis which is systematically conducted will be resulted in meaningful and reliable findings ([Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017](#)).



**Figure 1.** The stages of the community service activity

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### First Phase

The first phase is need analysis. This process was implemented by conducting a pre-test and unstructured interviews with the teachers. The results showed that twenty teachers were on the A1 level, eight teachers were on the A2 level, three teachers were on the B1 level, and one teacher was on the B2 level. Referring to their English Proficiency score, we conducted an unstructured interview with the teachers. As suggested by Richards and Farrell (2005), teachers' needs can also be evaluated through an informal way by initiating an interview or through a formal way through survey and other forms of data collection. The interview was conducted in March, 2024. The teachers were asked several questions related to their obstacles in learning English and their expectation of English training materials. The results of the need analysis resulted in the need of learning basic grammar, speaking practice, and useful expressions in classroom to support their teaching process.

### Second Phase

The second phase is designing workshop material. In this phase, the researchers designed the material based on the needs analysis. The material consisted of 6 tenses and one classroom management expressions which were designed interactively using power points. Besides 6 tenses, the researchers also provided two micro teaching sections to offer opportunities for teachers to practice their English competency together. Observing other teachers' teaching might assist the teachers in improving their self-awareness and replicating what they already know (Odabaş 1-Çimer, Çakır & Çimer, 2010). The materials were in the form of ppt slides as they were illustrated in Figure 2.



Figure 2. The examples of teaching materials

### Third Phase

The third phase is the implementation of workshop. Workshop was conducted on 21-22 of June, 2024 at a private school in Surakarta. The first day of the workshop was held from 8 a.m. – 12 p.m. The trainer delivered the material in English and Indonesian language. It was started with the introduction of the workshop. The trainer explained the importance of upgrading oneself with English skills. Then, the trainer proceeded to the next sessions. The detailed session could be seen through Table 1.

After completing the workshop, the following is the analysis of the results of the workshop which was derived from interpreting the questionnaire and the interviews. After receiving

materials and training, all of the teachers gave their opinions related to several aspects of the workshop material.

**Table 1.** Sessions of workshop

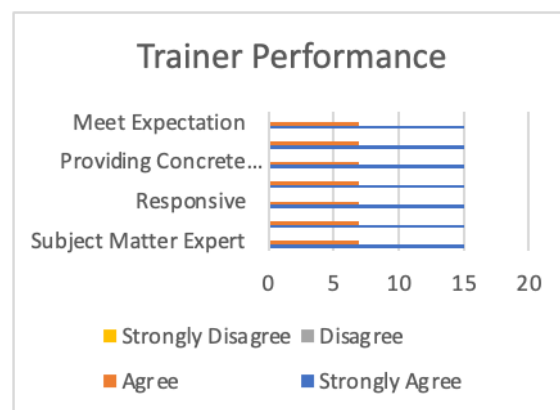
Session	Topic	Activity
Session 1	Simple Present Tense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trainer explained the material through PPT.</li> <li>• Teachers were asked to mention 4 things that they always do and not always do.</li> <li>• Teachers practiced speaking in group.</li> <li>• Reflection</li> </ul>
Session 2	Present Continuous Tense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers were given handout</li> <li>• Trainer explained the material through PPT</li> <li>• Teachers were placed in groups and showed some Figures. They were asked to describe the Figures one by one directly based on the Figures. (The man is wearing blue shirt)</li> </ul>
Session 3	Simple Past Tense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trainer explained the material through PPT</li> <li>• Teachers practiced speaking</li> <li>• Teachers were given a handout</li> <li>• Trainer and teachers discussed the handout</li> <li>• Trainer asked about what did they do in the past.</li> </ul>
Session 4	Classroom Language Phrases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trainer explained the material through PPT</li> <li>• Teachers were asked to read the phrases.</li> <li>• Teachers practiced doing exercises on the slides.</li> <li>• Teachers were given handouts as their homework.</li> <li>• Teachers practiced speaking in group.</li> </ul>
Closing Day 1	Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trainer and teachers do some reflection.</li> <li>• Teachers were given homework. They were asked to prepare a micro teaching in real situation. They should perform the micro teaching on the second day of workshop.</li> </ul>
Session 5	Question Words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers were initially divided into 5 groups.</li> <li>• Trainer explained the material and gave exercises from the handout.</li> <li>• Teachers practiced speaking.</li> <li>• Teachers were asked to make questions using spinning wheel.</li> </ul>
Session 6	Simple Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trainer reviewed some tenses.</li> <li>• Trainer explained the material.</li> <li>• Trainer and students discussed the handout.</li> <li>• They practiced speaking using materials in the power point slides.</li> </ul>
Session 7 & Session 8	Micro teaching & Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The teachers performed micro teaching in groups.</li> </ul>





**Figure 3.** Teachers' opinion on workshop material

Besides workshop material, teachers were also asked to give their opinions related to aspects of trainer performance. The results are shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Teachers' opinion on trainer's performance

From Figure 3 and Figure 4, it can be seen that all of the teachers felt the benefits of the workshop. They saw the workshop as something useful for them, and they felt satisfied both with the material presented and with the trainer's performance. From the results of the questionnaire, we dig deeper into the level of their understanding by conducting unstructured interviews after the workshop had finished. Throughout the interviews, we asked why specific aspects of the workshop were more effective than others. In terms of workshop material, The elementary and kindergarten teachers found the workshop materials applicable, relevant, interesting, and meeting their expectations because the content was directly related to their teaching needs and classroom challenges. The materials provided practical strategies that they could implement in their daily lessons, making them highly useful. Additionally, the topics were engaging and aligned with their professional development goals, ensuring that the workshop was both meaningful and beneficial for their teaching practices. In terms of trainer performance, all participants were satisfied with the trainer's performance, as they met expectations by delivering clear material, providing concrete examples, responding actively to questions, and demonstrating subject expertise.

Further, we also present the teachers' perceptions within several themes, such as teachers' emotional responses, teachers' comprehension, and teachers' collaboration. During their process of learning in the training, there are various emotions experienced by the teachers as what Pekrun

(2014) said that “the classroom is an emotional place”. In terms of emotional responses, all of the teachers involved in this study expressed positive emotions towards the workshop conducted by the trainer. They showed enthusiasm and interest in learning English. Teacher D stated:

*“I feel enthusiastic about learning English from this training. It is not something scary, but rather it is engaging and easy to follow. We often laugh and never get bored to follow the workshop.”*

This was because the topic presented was comprehensible and interesting enough to follow. Furthermore, two of them also conveyed that by joining workshop could help them alleviate their anxiety. Instead, it boosted up their level of confidence in speaking English. They mentioned that initially they were not confident with their ability in speaking English, so they were anxious to try to speak and teach in English. However, their confidence level during the workshop increased and they felt a lot more confident in speaking English. Based on the findings, it is possible to infer that the students' heightened level of interest and excitement is beneficial, as positive emotions are associated to improve academic achievement (Trigwell, Ellis, & Han 2012). Emotions bring influences on the teachers' perspectives and their attitudes in learning. Positive emotions in responding to learning process may encourage teachers to thrive by encouraging the teachers to be involved in the process of reflecting and self-evaluating (Lizzio et al. 2003; Pitt and Norton 2017).

Secondly, most of the teachers also mentioned that they could have better connections and understanding of the materials derived as the materials depicted were applicable and related with their daily life and their teaching process. Teacher F stated:

*“The topics given are relevant to our daily teaching environment, so later we can use it in our daily teaching.”*

They also perceived the trainer as a subject expert and they felt satisfied with the trainer's performance in giving examples based on real-life situations. Every questions were answered thoroughly by the trainer and teachers were also asked to find solution together. Trainer also delivered the material interactively and invited the other teachers for discussions. Teacher K reported that:

*“It was so interesting till I didn't realize how time flew. The presentation of the material was wrapped nicely and there were some games which help us to remember the material easily.”*

These outcomes showed that this training helped early childhood teachers to develop their skills, potential, and confidence to use English in the real classroom by applying the materials obtained from the training. In the same vein, research also suggests that successful professional development can enhance teachers' language instruction in EFL/ESL classrooms by changing their pedagogical practices (LaraAlecio et al. 2009; Lee & Buxton 2013). In sum, knowledge and abilities gained throughout the training, as the form of teachers' professional development, can then be applied in practice (Calderón, Slavin, & Sánchez, 2011).

Thirdly, active participation and collaboration were also vividly portrayed during the workshop. The study from Hegde, Hewett, and Terrell (2016) found that although most teachers were encouraged to join professional development on ELLs and expressed willingness to

participate, only 59% actually did. Various factors contributed to this gap, such as lack of true encouragement, perceived inconvenience, or a belief that they were already prepared. In contrast, this study shows that all early educators were not only motivated but also actively participated in the training. Moreover, they expressed a strong desire to continue attending similar training in the future. Teacher A specifically reported:

*"There are a lot of group activities which require us to speak in English together. Very helpful. I am also happy because I can practice and discuss it with the other teachers. So, we help each other."*

This portrayed a joyful and safe environment for learning. Creating an interactive atmosphere is critical for teachers' growth (Eun, 2011; Getenet et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2023). Through a cultural-historical lens, Eun (2011) also said that collaboration established circumstances for them to gain insight from one another. Teacher B added:

*"From the training process, we can learn from each other, so it is a very rich discussion. And when we find no solution, we ask the trainer to give feedback and answer our questions. Learning by practice. It's so applicable."*

Findings from the previous research in the past also have proved that a systematic, consistent, feedback giving, and engaging workshop are pivotal aspects in creating teachers' success (August & Shanahan, 2006; Crawford, Schmeister, & Biggs 2008). Collaborating with others do not only increases the academic expertise and knowledge of the teachers but also has a major impact on how well their students could perform (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings in this community service, the results of the workshop were highly encouraging. Teachers appreciated its practical approach and direct applicability to their teaching needs. They showed noticeable improvements in understanding basic English tenses and gained confidence in using English in their classrooms. The engaging exercises and group activities further enhanced their learning experience. All participants found the workshop beneficial and requested regular sessions, particularly on complex grammatical structures and subject-specific vocabulary. In conclusion, the workshop effectively supported teachers in delivering lessons with greater confidence. However, this study also has some limitations. The sample size was limited, which may affect the representativeness of the findings. Additionally, the study's short duration may not capture long-term effects. There is also a possibility of bias, as participants' responses might have been influenced by their perceptions or external factors. Future research should consider a larger sample and a longer study period to enhance reliability.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author team would like to thank the school and all teachers who have participated in this community service activity.



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