

## Parent's Perceptions of English Language Learning for Early Childhood Speakers of Regional Languages

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### ABSTRACT

This study looks at how parents feel about teaching English to young children who speak local languages at home. Researchers gathered data through interviews with parents of kindergarten children in Tangerang, Indonesia, to understand their experiences and views. The data were analyzed using thematic narrative analysis, revealing key themes in parents' views. Most parents see English as important for their child's future but also want to keep their local language alive. Some worry that speaking a regional language might make learning English harder, while others think kids can learn both well with the right support. Parents are happy with how schools teach English but hope teachers can help children master both languages. The study suggests schools should balance English and local language learning, train teachers in bilingual education, and involve parents more.

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### Introduction

English is an international language that plays an important role in the era of globalization. Mastery of this language is one of the key

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indicators in improving the competitiveness of human resources (Nasution & Sarah, 2016). Therefore, it is important for children in Indonesia to be introduced to English from an early age. Childhood is a golden period in language development, during which children have a high capacity to absorb and produce new languages (Z. B. Pamungkas & Amin, 2021). In addition, previous study also confirmed that early childhood is a crucial stage of rapid physical, psychological, and moral development (Dewi & Fitria, 2018).

The early introduction of English is believed to provide long-term benefits in educational, social, and economic aspects. Teachers in the Lubuklinggau Timur 1 area, for example, have stated that teaching English to young children is very important because it facilitates language acquisition and opens up greater opportunities in the job market in the future (Oktaviani & Fauzan, 2017). Parents also believe that English should not merely be introduced, but also taught in a more structured way from an early age (Diniyah, 2017).

However, the reality on the ground shows that there are challenges in teaching English, particularly related to the children's first language (L1) background. Most children in Indonesia still use regional languages as their mother tongue (Sutrisno et al., 2023). The use of regional languages, although culturally valuable, can affect the acquisition of a second language (L2) such as Indonesian and English. Research shows that strong mastery of L1 can hinder the process of acquiring L2 if not addressed with the right approach (Nazir, 2023).

The family, especially parents, plays an important role in shaping a child's personality and language skills from an early age. Parents support language development by introducing polite greetings, practicing the pronunciation of simple sentences, engaging children in conversation and exploration of their surroundings, reading stories to them, and applying a democratic parenting style (Anggraini, 2020). Although children begin to learn independently, parents still need to accompany and pay attention to their learning process at home. This guidance helps children feel more comfortable asking questions when they encounter difficulties and boosts their motivation to learn because they feel supported. Additionally, parents play a role in providing learning facilities and offering motivation and advice to encourage the child's enthusiasm (Hasibuan et al., 2023). Studies also show that parents' attitudes and support toward English significantly influence their children's motivation and success in language learning (Aswir et al., 2024; Coşkun, 2015; Kalayci & Ergül, 2020)

Given the situation, it is important to conduct a deeper study on parents' perceptions of the demands for English proficiency in young children, especially for those who have regional languages as their first language. This research aims to explore parents' understanding of the position and role of regional languages in their children's lives, as well as how they view the importance of mastering English. Since there is limited research focusing on children who speak regional languages as their first language, this study holds significant value. It is hoped that

the results of this study will contribute to the development of early childhood language education policies that not only support the acquisition of foreign languages but also encourage the preservation of regional languages as part of children's cultural identity.

### Methods

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to understand how people see and give meaning to a social or human problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This approach was chosen because the research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of parents' perceptions regarding English proficiency in young children who have regional languages as their first language. The focus of the study is not on measurement but rather on exploring the meanings, views, and experiences of the participants.

The research employed a case study approach, which examines a current issue closely in its real-life setting, especially when it is hard to separate the issue from its context (Yin & Robert, 2003). The study conducted at three kindergartens located in the Tangerang area. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of parents' perspectives in their specific school contexts. The location was selected because it reflects the diversity of the community in terms of ethnic background, language, and socio-cultural aspects. Such diversity provides a rich context to examine the dynamics between the use of regional languages and the early introduction of English.

The participants in this study were parents of three young children,

identified in this article as the parents of S, F, and A. Each attending a different kindergarten in Tangerang. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique that chooses participants based on specific considerations relevant to the research focus. It aims to avoid randomness and ensure the inclusion of specific, relevant cases in a study (Campbell et al., 2020). The criteria for selection included having a young child enrolled in kindergarten, using a regional language as the daily language at home, and having the child introduced to English learning at school.

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews with three parents as the main informants, each lasting approximately one hour. These interviews were conducted face-to-face in a relaxed setting to explore their perspectives on regional languages and English.

The data analysis followed a thematic approach, which involves examining the data to identify and describe recurring patterns that are then interpreted to uncover their underlying meanings (Naeem et al., 2023). The analysis began with verbatim transcription of the interview recordings, followed by initial coding of meaningful units that emerged from the participants' narratives. Key themes were then identified, such as parents' perceptions of English as a subject, parents' attitudes toward preserving regional languages, and parents' hopes for early childhood language education. Thematic narratives were developed, supported by direct quotations from the informants as evidence.

## Result and Discussions

The data analysis based on the interview results was conducted thematically around three main focuses: parents' perceptions of English as a subject, parents' attitudes toward preserving regional languages, and parents' hopes for language education in early childhood. Direct quotes from informants are included to strengthen the findings.

In terms of parents' perceptions of English, all parents recognize the crucial importance of mastering the language from an early age. S's parent expressed, *"At S's age, it is very important to learn English so that children can practice speaking it."* F's parent added, *"Because at an early age, children still have very good memory capacity, so it is easy for my child and others to absorb a new language. Also, English is an international language that helps them gain a broader cultural understanding."* A's parent emphasized the importance of English proficiency for her child's education, saying, *"It is very important for young children like mine to master English because it will prepare them for elementary school."*

In practice, parents observe the frequency of English use at home and school. A's parent revealed, *"I often hear my child speaking English with classmates at home, coincidentally, my child's friends at school are from Southeast regions."* Meanwhile, S's parent and F's parent acknowledged that their children rarely use English at home but are introduced to it through media. S's parent said, *"S watches Barbie movies that sometimes have English in them."* F's parent added, *"Whenever there is a school assignment, my child always listens to children's songs in English."* These responses are consistent with previous studies confirming that

vocabulary development is a crucial aspect of language acquisition in children (Alfiani & Rukhiyah, 2019).

Overall, parents have a positive perception of the importance of English mastery from an early age. They believe that introducing English can support children's communication skills and open wider opportunities in the future. Previous study also confirmed that parents view English education for young children as important in today's fast-changing and digital era (Chaniago et al., 2023). Although English is not frequently used at home, media such as English movies and songs, along with school interactions, play an important role in their children's learning.

Parents continue to maintain the use of regional languages as the primary language at home. S's parent and F's parent mentioned Sundanese as the language they use daily. S's parent said, *"At home, if there are friends or relatives, they often speak Sundanese."* F's parent noted, *"My child often hears the surrounding people speaking regional languages."* A's parent reported that Javanese and Batak are used at home, stating, *"I often hear my child speaking in a regional language if the parents use that language."*

Regarding the influence of regional languages on children's English ability, S's parent stated, *"It greatly affects because if there are still people around S speaking the regional language, it makes it difficult for her to learn English."* F's parent agreed, saying simply, *"It influences."* However, A's parent had a different view, *"It does not affect my child's English skills*

*because since attending kindergarten, my child prefers to speak in English, especially in vocabulary."*

Parents highly value and preserve the use of regional languages as the first language at home. While some parents believe that regional language use can affect English mastery, others argue that both languages can coexist without hindering each other, as long as the learning environment supports them properly.

On the subject of parents' hopes, they expressed a desire for English teaching in kindergarten to be effective and to have a positive impact. S's parent feels satisfied with the teacher's instruction, saying, *"S's teacher teaches English very well because my child has shown many improvements in language skills."* F's parent also expressed appreciation, *"I am very satisfied with my child's kindergarten teacher who teaches English because my child can now speak English."* Initially, A's parent worried that her child still used the regional language, saying, *"At first, I was worried because my child still spoke the regional language, but over time, my child now generally can speak English and often uses English at home because of the teachers' instruction."*

Additionally, parents hope their children can master English while also preserving regional languages as part of their cultural identity. This finding is similar to previous studies showing that learning English and keeping local languages can go together, as both are important for children's future and cultural identity (Ate & Muliani, 2025; S. D. P. Pamungkas et al., 2023). Parents wish for English education in

kindergarten to be successful and produce real improvements in their children's language abilities. They are pleased with the teachers' roles in the teaching process and hope children can master English while maintaining their regional languages as part of their cultural heritage and family identity.

### **Conclusion**

Parents of young children who speak regional languages recognize the importance of introducing English at an early age to support communication skills and future opportunities. While they maintain and value the use of regional languages at home as a vital part of cultural identity, many believe that both languages can coexist without hindering each other when supported by the right learning environment. Parents are generally positive about the role of English education in kindergartens and appreciate the efforts of teachers in facilitating their children's language development. They hope that English learning will be effective and meaningful, while also preserving regional languages as an essential part of their children's cultural heritage. This finding aligns with previous study (Fitria & Holisoh, 2022) showing that parents play a key role in supporting school learning and aligning with teachers to help children learn better.

Early childhood language education should balance English learning with the preservation of regional languages. Educators and policymakers need to create curricula that support both languages and respect cultural identities. Parental involvement should be encouraged

to help children develop bilingual skills effectively. Further research is needed on teaching methods that address the challenges of multilingual children. Teacher training programs should also focus on bilingual education and cultural sensitivity to improve early childhood language learning outcomes.

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