

Unveiling 4th Grade Students' Inaugural Perceptions of English Lessons: A First-Time Encounter

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini didasarkan pada tiga tujuan utama. Pertama, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap secara mendalam persepsi awal siswa kelas empat terhadap pelajaran bahasa Inggris pada pertemuan pertama. Melalui pemahaman yang mendalam tersebut, penelitian diharapkan dapat memberikan gambaran yang akurat mengenai respon siswa terhadap materi pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di awal semester. Kedua, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis faktor-faktor yang dapat mempengaruhi persepsi awal siswa kelas empat terhadap pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Pemahaman terhadap faktor-faktor tersebut akan memberikan wawasan lebih jauh mengenai aspek-aspek yang perlu diperhatikan dalam merancang dan mengelola pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di kelas empat. Terakhir, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk merumuskan rekomendasi atau strategi yang dapat digunakan pendidik untuk meningkatkan minat dan partisipasi siswa dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di kelas empat. Penelitian ini akan menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif yang bertujuan untuk memperoleh pemahaman mendalam tentang perjuangan dan persepsi siswa kelas empat mengenai pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Dari penelitian ini dapat disimpulkan bahwa mayoritas siswa menunjukkan minat dan antusiasme dalam belajar bahasa Inggris. Hal ini mencerminkan pentingnya peran guru dan keterlibatan kegiatan pembelajaran dalam membentuk persepsi positif terhadap mata pelajaran.

Kata kunci: *Persepsi Siswa, Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris.*

Abstract

This research is based on three main objectives. First, the research aims to uncover in-depth the initial perceptions of fourth-grade students toward English lessons during the first encounter. Through this profound understanding, the research is expected to provide an accurate depiction of students' responses to English learning materials at the beginning of the semester. Second, the research aims to analyze the factors that can influence fourth-grade students' initial perceptions of English learning. Understanding these factors will provide further insights into the aspects that need to be considered in designing and managing English learning in fourth grade. Finally, the research aims to formulate recommendations or strategies that educators can use to enhance the interest and participation of students in English learning in fourth grade. This research will use a qualitative research design that aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the struggles and perceptions of fourth grade students regarding English language learning. From this research it can be concluded that the majority of students show interest and enthusiasm in learning English. This reflects the important role of teachers and the involvement of learning activities in forming positive perceptions of subjects.

Keywords : *Student Perception, English Lessons.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the crucial pillars in shaping character and enhancing the intellectual capacity of individuals. In the current era of globalization, proficiency in the English language has become increasingly essential. English lessons in elementary schools play a crucial role in introducing students to foreign language skills, which can later become valuable assets in facing future challenges. English education at the elementary level is becoming more strategic, given the growing demand for proficient English speakers in this era of globalization. Recognizing this, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Indonesia has incorporated English into the Elementary School Independent Curriculum, officially implemented in 2021/2022. This decision aims to accommodate the changing times and prepare the young generation of Indonesia to meet global demands.

According to experts such as Cameron (2001), Cole & Cole (2001), Meisani (2018), Nurdiawati (2019), and Scott & Yteberg (1990), learning a foreign language, especially English, is most effective when taught at an early age. At this age, children have a better ability to gather information through their direct experiences. Introducing early childhood thinking abilities also provides an understanding of efforts to introduce the English language. Early English learning also has a positive impact on children's confidence as they progress to higher levels of education.

In line with this, learning English at an early age is crucial in establishing a solid foundation for students' language skills. This effort is aimed at optimizing the learning experience, considering that children have optimal receptivity during this period. Consistent with Nurdiawati's research (2019), teaching English in early childhood should be designed considering the developmental level of children, making learning more meaningful and not burdensome for learners.

Learning English at an early age can be effective, especially if applied both at home and in school. However, because not all families in Indonesia use English as their daily language, the school environment often becomes the only place where students can learn and be exposed to the English language (Meisani & Musthafa, 2019; Musthafa, 2010).

English teaching at the Elementary School (SD) level in Indonesia has been part of the curriculum since 1994 based on the Minister of Education and Culture Decree No. 060/U/1993. English is taught as a local content subject with the aim of providing students with competence in understanding the use of English in both oral and written forms, as well as simple expressions. According to Sudrajat (2015), English lessons in elementary schools usually begin from the fourth grade, and almost all schools, both public and private, strive to teach English, leading to rapid developments in English teaching at the elementary school level (Maili, 2018).

English education at the elementary level poses its own challenges, especially when introducing it to fourth-grade students who are in their formative years. The first encounter with English language learning can have a profound influence on students' perceptions and interests in this subject. Therefore, understanding students' initial perceptions of English lessons during the first encounter becomes an important aspect that needs to be explored. With the inclusion of English in the curriculum, an evaluation is needed to understand whether this educational reform has a positive impact on students' learning attitudes, particularly at the fourth-grade level. Additionally, English teaching in Indonesia has specific goals, namely, to develop communicative competence in students. This indicates a close connection between classroom learning and students' ability to communicate efficiently, not only at the local level but also at the national level.

In the effort to understand the dynamics of English learning in fourth-grade classrooms, a set of fundamental questions is formulated to guide the research focus. First, what are the initial perceptions of fourth-grade students toward English lessons during the first encounter? This question highlights students' initial responses to the subject, exploring how they react and feel about the introduction of English in the early stages of learning. Furthermore, an analysis of the factors that can influence students' initial perceptions of English learning needs to be conducted. A deep understanding of these factors will provide a

more comprehensive picture of the variables that affect students' perceptions of the subject. Finally, what efforts can educators make to enhance the interest and participation of students in English lessons in fourth grade? This question seeks practical solutions and recommendations to improve the effectiveness of teaching, ensuring that the teaching methods applied can motivate and engage students optimally.

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This research refers to the findings and perspectives of several experts who have conducted similar research or made significant contributions related to students' perceptions of English lessons at the Elementary School (SD) level. The Theory of Community of Practice proposed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) provides a foundation for understanding that English language learning is not confined to the classroom but also occurs in social contexts outside the classroom. Therefore, students' perceptions of English lessons may be influenced by their experiences and interactions outside the classroom environment. Vygotsky (1978), through his Zone of Proximal Development Theory, emphasizes the crucial role of social interaction in learning. In this research, understanding how students feel supported and engaged in social interactions that facilitate English language learning can provide insights into their perceptions of this subject.

Ellis's Input Hypothesis (2008) states that students learn from language they understand. Thus, the clarity of English learning materials can be a crucial factor influencing students' perceptions of the subject. Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory (1985) emphasizes the diverse intelligences possessed by individuals. Understanding students' intelligences can help educators adjust English teaching strategies to better suit students' needs, thereby enhancing their perceptions of this subject. Nation (2003) contributes the Lexical Approach Theory, emphasizing the importance of vocabulary and lexical understanding in language learning. Students' perception of the relevance of English vocabulary to everyday life can play a crucial role in their understanding and interest in the subject. By combining the theoretical foundations of these experts, this research will be able to provide a more holistic and informed view of fourth-grade students' perceptions of English lessons during the first encounter.

METHOD

This investigation will employ a qualitative research design aimed at gaining a profound understanding of the struggles and perceptions of fourth-grade students regarding English language learning. The study will utilize two primary data collection methods, namely interviews and questionnaires, as instruments to capture the views and experiences of the students.

Research Design: This research adopts a qualitative research design to detail and comprehend the perceptions of fourth-grade students regarding English language learning at SD INP Antang II Makassar. The qualitative approach is considered most suitable as it

allows for an in-depth exploration of students' experiences and the dynamics of English language learning.

Participants: Six fourth-grade students at SD INP Antang II Makassar are selected as respondents. The selection of respondents employs purposive sampling techniques to ensure that the chosen participants have representative experiences and perceptions related to English language learning.

Data Collection Instruments:

1. **Interviews:** Face-to-face interviews will be conducted with students to explore in-depth their experiences and perceptions of English language learning. A set of questions has been designed to guide the interviews and ensure the continuity of the discussion.
2. **Questionnaires:** Questionnaires will be given to students to detail and deepen their understanding of their perceptions of English language learning in and outside the classroom. The questionnaire questions are designed to support and complement the data obtained through interviews.

Research Procedures:

1. **Respondent Selection:** Through purposive sampling, six fourth-grade students with diverse experiences in English language learning are chosen as respondents.
2. **Conducting Interviews and Distributing Questionnaires:** Interviews will be conducted with students to understand their perceptions and experiences. Meanwhile, questionnaires will be distributed to students to obtain their written responses regarding English language learning.
3. **Consultation with Teachers:** English teachers will be consulted for further discussion about interview questions and approval for the use of interviews as a research instrument.

Research Location: This research is conducted at SD INP Antang II Makassar, where fourth-grade students will serve as respondents. The location is chosen because it reflects the real context of English language learning at the elementary school level. By combining interviews, questionnaires, and consultations with teachers, the research aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth overview of the fourth-grade students' perceptions of English language learning both in and outside the classroom.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Initial Students' Perception of English Lessons on the First Meeting

The initial perception of fourth-grade students towards English lessons on the first encounter can provide profound insights into how students interpret and respond to their introduction to this subject. From the interview results with students, several key aspects can be analyzed to understand the complex dynamics of students' perceptions of English learning at the beginning of the semester.

Firstly, it is important to note that all students mentioned that this is the first time they are learning English. This new experience can impact how students respond to the lesson materials and shape their initial perceptions of the subject. However, interestingly, despite it being a first-time experience, students showed interest and a willingness to learn English more seriously, as reflected in their positive responses to related questions. Furthermore, attention to the teacher's attitude and learning activities becomes a crucial element in shaping students' perceptions. Interview results indicate that students feel excited during English lessons, and the teacher's personality and teaching methods play a key role in creating a positive atmosphere. Learning activities such as assignments, reading, writing, and note-taking were also identified as elements influencing students' perceptions. The role of classmates can also significantly influence students' perceptions. Students reported varying attitudes among classmates, from enthusiasm to laziness, which can affect their learning enthusiasm. The importance of active participation from classmates is evident from students' responses, stating that if classmates participate well, it can motivate their learning enthusiasm.

Regarding learning difficulties, students face challenges such as understanding letters, memorizing, reading, and writing in English. However, students show determination in overcoming these difficulties, employing strategies such as reading more, practicing at home, asking the teacher, and practicing writing. Parental support is also seen as a crucial factor. Parents provide assistance in completing homework, provide learning facilities such as dictionaries, books, and smartphones, and offer direct guidance in learning English. Positive interaction between students and parents can create a supportive learning environment at home.

Overall, the interview results provide a holistic picture of the complex dynamics in students' initial perceptions of English learning. This analysis will be a crucial foundation in formulating recommendations and education strategies that better align with the needs and expectations of elementary school students, with the goal of enhancing the effectiveness of English learning and increasing students' motivation to learn.

Factors Influencing Initial Students' Perception of English Learning

This sub-discussion delves into identifying the factors influencing fourth-grade students' initial perceptions of English learning. According to the interview results with fourth-grade students, these factors encompass not only prior experiences, student interests, and peer support but also involve the influence of teachers, experiences of difficulties, and family support. Firstly, the interview results indicate that prior experiences in learning English play a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions. Students mentioned that this is the first time they are learning English. Research by Krashen (1981) suggests that early exposure to a foreign language, especially at a young age, can enhance students' ability to understand and use the language naturally.

Student interest and engagement are also identified as key factors in shaping positive perceptions of English learning. The awareness of the importance of student interest in education is reinforced by the research of René et al. (2017), which indicates that student interest in a subject can enhance motivation and engagement in learning. The influence of teachers also emerges as a crucial factor. Students provided positive feedback on the teacher's personality and teaching methods, consistent with the findings of Hattie's research (2003), emphasizing that a positive relationship between teachers and students can improve learning outcomes. Engaging and interactive teaching methods are also identified as elements influencing students' perceptions, in line with Pritchard's research (2017) stating that varied teaching methods can enhance student interest and participation.

The importance of social support from peers is also reflected in the interview results. According to Wentzel's research (1998), social support from classmates can have a positive impact on students' learning enthusiasm and perceptions of the subject. Similarly, experiences of difficulties in learning English also emerge as a factor influencing students' perceptions. Gardner's research (1985) suggests that challenges in learning can trigger motivation and provide opportunities to develop effective learning strategies. Family support also plays a role in shaping students' perceptions. Some students mentioned that they receive support from their families in completing homework and providing learning resources. Epstein's research (2018) confirms that family involvement can enhance students' learning outcomes and motivation.

In line with this research, the factors influencing fourth-grade students' perceptions of English learning prove to be multifaceted. By detailing prior experiences, student interests, teacher influences, peer support, experiences of difficulties, and family support, educators can design more effective and relevant learning strategies tailored to the needs of students in the early stages of English learning.

As for the factors that can influence fourth-grade students' initial perceptions of English learning successfully identified based on interviews with students, there are several factors that can play a key role in shaping their perceptions of the English subject.

- **Previous Experience in Learning English**
Positive responses from students, stating that this is the first time they are learning English, can provide an overview of the extent to which previous experiences can influence their initial perceptions. These experiences may include the level of comfort or anxiety students feel towards the new subject.
- **Student Interest and Engagement**
Positive responses to questions about whether they are interested and enthusiastic about learning English indicate that student interest plays a crucial role in shaping a positive perception of the subject. Student engagement can also be reflected in their positive attitudes towards English lessons.
- **Teacher Influence and Teaching Methods**
Positive attitudes of students towards the English teacher and positive responses to teaching methods indicate that these factors can contribute to shaping students' perceptions. The teacher's personality, teaching approach, and their success in capturing students' interest can influence initial perceptions.
- **Peer Influence**
Students' responses to the attitudes of classmates during lessons illustrate that social factors, such as support and enthusiasm from classmates, can play a significant role in shaping students' perceptions of English lessons.
- **Experience of Learning Difficulties**
Identifying students' difficulties in learning English provides additional insights. Some students face challenges, such as difficulty in reading or memorization, which can affect their perceptions of this subject.
- **Family Support in Learning**
Family support, such as helping with homework or providing learning resources, can play a significant role in shaping students' positive perceptions of learning English.

By detailing these factors, it can be concluded that previous experiences, student interest, teacher influence, peer support, experiences of difficulties, and family support are key elements that interact in shaping fourth-grade students' perceptions of English learning. Educators can pay attention to and respond to these factors to improve students' learning experiences and enhance their positive perceptions of the subject.

Efforts of Educators to Increase Students' Interest and Participation in English Lessons

Educators play a crucial role in creating a learning environment that stimulates students' interest and participation. By detailing strategies based on student interview responses, here is a further description of efforts that educators can make:

- **Understanding the Initial Level of Students' Understanding of English**
First, a profound understanding of students' initial understanding of English becomes a crucial foundation. Educators need to design learning that considers the diversity of students' experiences and knowledge related to this language. Carefully structured material introduction, focusing on fundamental aspects, will assist students who are learning English for the first time.
- **To Increase Student Interest**
Second, to enhance student interest, educators can capitalize on their seriousness in learning English. Integrating relevant material into students' everyday lives, such as topics related to popular culture or technology, can strengthen students' engagement in the learning process.
- **Creating a Positive Learning Atmosphere**
Third, creating a positive spirit in learning is essential. Educators need to maintain students' enthusiasm with an optimistic and positive approach. The interaction between teachers and students should provide support and positive reinforcement for every student's achievement.

- **Implementation of Engaging Teaching Methods**
Fourth, the application of interesting teaching methods is a strategic step. Involving students in creative and dynamic learning, such as using educational games or interactive technology, can make the learning process more interesting and relevant.
- **Providing Varied Learning Activities**
Fifth, providing varied learning activities can stimulate student interest and participation. A comprehensive approach involving tasks, reading, writing, and discussions will ensure that each student can find a learning style that suits their preferences.
- **Building and Maintaining Positive Social Interaction**
Sixth, the importance of building and maintaining positive social interaction in the classroom. Educators can design activities that encourage collaboration and the exchange of ideas among students. A positive attitude from classmates can be additional motivation to enhance the learning spirit.
- **Utilizing Motivation Based on Peer Achievement**
Seventh, utilizing motivation based on peer achievement can be an effective strategy. Educators can design group activities or collaborative projects that stimulate active participation, with the hope that shared enthusiasm will improve performance and learning motivation.
- **Providing Additional Support for Individual Challenges**
Eighth, providing additional support to overcome individual difficulties. Each student has a different level of understanding and learning pace. Therefore, educators need to provide additional support such as tutoring or additional materials to help students overcome learning barriers.
- **Involving Parents in the Learning Process**
Ninth, involving parents in the learning process can provide consistent support. Educators can organize activities or workshops involving parents to provide insights and additional support in helping students learn English at home.

Through the combination of these strategies, it is expected that educators can create a learning environment that not only educates but also inspires the interest and participation of fourth-grade students in learning English. With a responsive and focused approach, the learning process becomes more meaningful and has a positive impact on students' development.

CONCLUSION

This research provides a valuable initial overview of how fourth-grade students perceive English learning in the first meeting. The results of interviews and qualitative data analysis offer profound insights into perceptions, interests, and dynamics of interactions that occur in the classroom, providing a strong foundation for the development of better teaching methods in the future. In conclusion, the majority of students demonstrated interest and enthusiasm in learning English. This reflects the importance of the teacher's role and engaging learning activities in shaping a positive perception of the subject. Students mentioned that the positive influence of the teacher and support from classmates significantly impact their views on English. However, the research also identified some challenges faced by students, particularly related to understanding English letters and words. The existence of these difficulties highlights the need for a more differential learning approach and additional support for students who may be at various levels of understanding. The importance of implementing interesting and relevant teaching methods is a central point in this conclusion. Teachers can leverage these insights to design more focused, responsive, and student-centered learning strategies for fourth-grade students. The use of technology, creative activities, and personalized approaches can be effective means to enhance students' interest and understanding of English. Furthermore, this conclusion emphasizes the need for collaborative education among teachers, students, and parents. By actively involving parents in English learning at home, educators can create better synergy

between the classroom and home environment, providing holistic support for student development. To enhance the effectiveness of English learning in the fourth grade, the previously outlined recommendations need to be considered. With the support and implementation of these suggestions, it is expected that English teaching in the fourth grade can become more dynamic, engaging, and capable of meeting diverse student needs, opening doors to deep understanding and language skills development.

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