

Early Childhood Teachers' Perceptions of AI-Assisted English Language Teaching at RA YKU 02

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Abstract

This study investigates early childhood teachers' perceptions of AI-assisted English language teaching at RA YKU 02, focusing on the importance of early instruction, effective strategies, and implementation challenges. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive research design, data were collected from four teachers through closed-ended Likert-scale questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The findings reveal that teachers hold positive perceptions toward AI-assisted English teaching, including the integration of digital and AI-supported media, with 4 out of 4 participants agreeing that English proficiency enhances readiness for higher education. Total Physical Response (TPR) was identified by 4 out of 4 teachers as the most suitable strategy, while 3 out of 4 teachers emphasized the effectiveness of songs, games, visual media, and AI-supported tools. However, significant hurdles were identified, as 4 out of 4 participants reported limited instructional time, inadequate media, and limited access to AI-based resources as major obstacles, alongside a fear of mispronunciation among non-specialist teachers. To address these gaps, teachers demonstrate agency by utilizing digital and AI-supported resources such as YouTube and Digital TV. This research underscores the need for continuous, context-sensitive professional development, particularly in integrating AI and digital tools, to ensure effective English instruction in religious-based early childhood settings.

Keywords: English for Young Learners, Teacher Perceptions, Raudhatul Athfal, Instructional Strategies, Challenges

1. Introduction

Early childhood education represents a golden age during which children's cognitive capacities and brain plasticity are at their peak, allowing them to absorb new knowledge effectively, including second or foreign languages. In the context of globalization, the introduction of English in early childhood settings is no longer viewed merely as a supplementary subject but as a strategic effort to foster early linguistic awareness. Several studies have confirmed that early exposure to a foreign language contributes positively to children's metalinguistic awareness, cognitive flexibility, and language sensitivity (Adisti et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, the implementation of English instruction in early childhood education, including Raudhatul Athfal (RA), often intersects with curricular orientations that prioritize religious values and character education. This situation requires a balanced and context-sensitive approach so that foreign language learning does not contradict, but rather complements, Islamic values and local cultural principles. Previous research indicates that the successful integration of English in religious-based early childhood institutions depends not only on curricular design but also on teachers' perceptions and acceptance of English as part of holistic child development (Firdaus, 2023).

At RA YKU 02, English instruction is conducted by classroom teachers who are graduates of Pendidikan Guru Raudhatul Athfal (PGRA) and generally do not possess a formal academic background in English for Young Learners (EYL). Although these teachers demonstrate strong pedagogical competence in early childhood education, limited training in English instruction may influence their confidence, self-efficacy, and instructional decision-making. Research consistently shows that teachers' beliefs and perceptions play a crucial role in shaping how English is introduced to young learners, particularly when teachers are non-specialists in the subject (Lesia & Petrus, 2022; Aswad et al., 2022).

Teachers who hold positive perceptions of early English education tend to adopt child-friendly and engaging strategies, such as songs, games, storytelling, visual media, and digital or AI-supported

tools, which align with young learners' developmental characteristics. Conversely, low self-efficacy may lead teachers to minimize English use due to fear of making mistakes, thereby limiting children's exposure to the language (Sato & Ma, 2025). From a theoretical perspective, Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) emphasizes meaningful, interactive, and play-based learning, where affective factors such as motivation, confidence, and a supportive learning environment are crucial (Zein & Butler, 2023).

Despite the growing number of studies on early English instruction, most existing research focuses on public schools or institutions with specialist English teachers and emphasizes students' learning outcomes. Limited attention has been given to religious-based early childhood institutions such as RA, where generalist teachers must balance English instruction with strong emphases on Islamic character education. This gap highlights the need to explore teachers' perceptions, instructional strategies, and challenges in implementing English instruction within this unique educational context.

In recent years, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital technologies has begun to influence language teaching practices, including in early childhood education. AI-supported tools such as interactive media, educational applications, and online platforms can assist teachers in providing more engaging and accessible English learning experiences. For non-specialist teachers, AI can also serve as a supportive resource for improving pronunciation, accessing teaching materials, and enhancing instructional confidence. However, the extent to which AI is integrated in religious-based early childhood institutions such as RA remains underexplored, particularly in relation to teachers' perceptions and classroom practices. Recent studies highlight that Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significant potential in enhancing language learning by improving interaction, engagement, and learning efficiency. AI-based tools can provide adaptive learning experiences and support both teachers and students in the learning process, although challenges related to technical skills and accessibility remain (Marzuki et al., 2026).

Therefore, this study aims to investigate teachers' perceptions of AI-assisted English language teaching at RA YKU 02, identify teaching strategies perceived as effective for young learners, and examine the challenges faced by teachers in implementing English instruction, including the use of AI and digital tools. The research questions guiding this study are: (1) how do teachers perceive the importance of English instruction for young learners at RA YKU; (2) what teaching strategies, including AI-supported approaches, do teachers perceive as effective in teaching English to young learners; and (3) what challenges, including those related to AI integration, do teachers encounter in implementing English instruction in a religious-based early childhood education context?

2. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore teachers' perceptions of AI-assisted English language teaching at RA YKU 02. This approach was selected because it allows a detailed description of participants' perceptions and experiences within their natural educational context, making it suitable for perception-based educational research (Rustamana et al., 2024).

The research was conducted at RA YKU 02, Sarang, an Islamic early childhood education institution where English is introduced as part of classroom activities. The participants consisted of four classroom teachers who were actively involved in teaching young learners. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure that the participants had direct experience related to English language teaching in early childhood settings (Taherdoost, 2022).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended items using a five-point Likert scale: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire was administered to all four teachers to obtain an overall description of their perceptions regarding the importance, instructional strategies, challenges, and the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in English language teaching for young learners. Closed-ended Likert-scale questionnaires are commonly used in descriptive

research to identify trends and general tendencies in participants' responses (Taherdoost, 2022).

In-depth interviews were conducted with one teacher to gain deeper insights into issues identified in the questionnaire data. The interview served to clarify and illustrate teachers' perceptions, particularly related to instructional practices, the use of AI and digital tools, and challenges encountered in the classroom.

Data analysis was conducted descriptively by summarizing questionnaire responses using absolute frequencies due to the small number of participants. Interview data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns related to teachers' perceptions of English language teaching (Jowsey et al., 2021). Data triangulation was applied by comparing questionnaire findings with interview data to enhance the credibility of the results. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality, were maintained throughout the research process.

3. Result

This section presents the findings obtained from questionnaires and an in-depth interview conducted with one teacher at RA YKU 02, focusing on teachers' perceptions of English language teaching, including the integration of AI and digital tools. Questionnaire data are summarized in Table 1 and presented in absolute frequencies rather than percentages due to the small number of participants (n = 4). The interview data are used to illustrate and clarify the trends identified in the questionnaire responses.

Table 1. Teachers' Perceptions of English Language Teaching at RA YKU 02.

No	Statements	Responses					Total Agree
		SA	A	N	D	SD	
<i>Perceptions of Importance and Benefits</i>							
1	Early introduction to English, supported by AI-based media, enhances children's development and confidence	3	0	1	0	0	3
2	Students at RA YKU 02 show higher interest and enthusiasm when English is taught using digital or AI-based media	1	1	1	1	0	2
3	English, supported by technology and AI tools, contributes to readiness for the next education level.	1	3	0	0	0	4
<i>Effective Teaching Strategies</i>							
4	Songs, games, visual media, and AI-based tools are more effective than one-way lectures.	2	1	0	1	0	3
5	Total Physical Response (TPR), combined with digital or AI support, is suitable for RA children's characteristics.	3	1	0	0	0	4
6	Storytelling supported by digital or AI tools is a fun way to introduce contextual vocabulary.	0	2	2	0	0	2
<i>Perceived Challenges and Implementation</i>							
7	Feeling comfortable introducing basic English using digital or AI-assisted tools (numbers, colors,	2	1	1	0	0	3

	animals).						
8	I apply various interactive strategies, including AI-based media, to create a fun learning atmosphere.	0	2	1	1	0	2
9	Good classroom management and the use of digital tools influence the success of English delivery.	1	3	0	0	0	4
10	Limited media, AI access, and time allocation are the main challenges.	1	3	0	0	0	4
11	Teachers need specific training or practical guidance in using AI and digital tools for early childhood English teaching.	2	2	0	0	0	4
12	Collaboration with schools and the use of digital/AI resources help the teaching process.	1	3	0	0	0	4

Note: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree. Data are presented in absolute frequencies due to the small sample size.

The findings indicate that teachers at RA YKU 02 generally hold positive perceptions toward early English instruction, including the integration of AI and digital tools. 3 out of 4 teachers agreed that introducing English at an early age, supported by digital or AI-based media, enhances children’s development and confidence, and 4 out of 4 teachers agreed that English contributes to children’s readiness for the next level of education. These perceptions are supported by interview data. The interviewed teacher explained that early English exposure helps children avoid difficulties at later stages of education, stating, “If children are not introduced to English in kindergarten, they will find it difficult when they learn English at the next level.” The same participant also emphasized the long-term value of English for children’s future, noting, “For their future, children need broader insights, and one of them is being able to speak a foreign language.” However, responses related to students’ enthusiasm, particularly when using digital or AI-based media, were more varied, with 2 out of 4 teachers reporting high interest in English lessons and 1 out of 4 teachers expressing a neutral view.

In terms of instructional strategies, 4 out of 4 teachers identified Total Physical Response (TPR) as a suitable approach for teaching English to young learners. The interviewed teacher described TPR as effective because it encourages children to learn through movement, explaining, “Children learn better when they move and act, not just listen.” In addition, 3 out of 4 teachers indicated that songs, games, visual media, and AI-supported tools were more effective than one-way instruction. The interviewed teacher also described the use of digital resources to support teaching and self-preparation, stating, “There is digital TV that can be used as a medium, or I learn the pronunciation myself from YouTube before teaching the children.” Teachers also reported using digital tools such as YouTube which can be considered as part of AI-supported or technology-enhanced media, to assist pronunciation and teaching preparation. Storytelling received mixed responses, with 2 out of 4 teachers viewing it as effective and the remaining teachers expressing neutral opinions. This hesitation was further clarified in the interview, as the participant expressed concern about pronunciation accuracy, stating, “I am afraid the pronunciation might be incorrect, and it could make it difficult for the child to pronounce the words fluently.”

The results also reveal several challenges in implementing English instruction at RA YKU 02. 4 out of 4 teachers identified limited instructional time, limited access to digital or AI-based media, and inadequate teaching resources as major obstacles. The interviewed teacher explained that English is often integrated into other activities due to time constraints, stating, “English is not a main subject, so the time is very limited and usually combined with other activities.” Regarding teacher readiness, 3 out of 4 teachers reported feeling comfortable introducing basic English topics such as numbers,

colors, and animals, while 1 out of 4 teachers expressed hesitation when required to use English more extensively. Fear of incorrect pronunciation emerged as a recurring psychological barrier, as articulated by the interviewed teacher. Despite these challenges, 4 out of 4 teachers emphasized the importance of good classroom management and collaboration with the school environment. Furthermore, 4 out of 4 teachers expressed a strong need for specific training or practical guidance in teaching English to young learners, including the use of AI and digital tools, which was reinforced by the interview statement, “I really need direct assistance and training, so I can learn more about English and teach it correctly.”

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that teachers at RA YKU 02 generally hold positive perceptions toward the introduction of English in early childhood education, including the integration of AI and digital tools. Based on questionnaire responses and interview data, English is perceived not merely as an academic subject, but as a supportive component of children’s development, particularly in fostering confidence, early linguistic awareness, and readiness for subsequent levels of education. This perception is consistent with previous studies emphasizing the benefits of early English exposure when implemented through developmentally appropriate approaches (Pradini et al., 2022). Within the RA context, English learning is viewed as complementary rather than contradictory to religious education, allowing teachers to position English as a supportive skill within an Islamic educational environment (Wahyuningsih, 2022).

In terms of instructional strategies, the strong preference for Total Physical Response (TPR), songs, games, visual media, and AI-supported tools reflects teachers’ awareness of age-appropriate practices for young learners. The unanimous agreement on the suitability of TPR indicates that movement-based instruction aligns with the developmental characteristics of RA children by facilitating comprehension, maintaining engagement, and reducing learning anxiety. This finding supports the principles of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL), which emphasize multisensory and play-based learning as effective approaches for early language acquisition (Pinter, 2022).

However, storytelling received only moderate agreement among the teachers, suggesting a degree of hesitation in implementing activities that require more extensive language use. This finding aligns with research indicating that non-specialist teachers often experience limited confidence in vocabulary mastery and pronunciation accuracy when teaching English (Pokrivčáková, 2020).

In this study, fear of mispronunciation emerged as a notable psychological barrier, as revealed in the interview data, which constrained teachers’ willingness to use English more actively in the classroom. This highlights that effective early English instruction requires not only pedagogical strategies but also sufficient linguistic self-confidence.

The findings also reveal several systemic challenges faced by teachers at RA YKU 02, particularly limited instructional time, inadequate teaching media, and limited access to AI-based resources. These challenges are commonly reported in educational contexts where English is not positioned as a core subject (Farrell, 2023).

As a result of these limitations, English instruction at RA YKU 02 tends to focus on basic vocabulary and simple expressions integrated into daily activities. Despite restricted time and resources, teachers demonstrated adaptive practices by utilizing digital tools such as YouTube and Digital TV to support pronunciation and classroom instruction. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that both teachers and students tend to have positive perceptions toward the use of ICT in English learning. ICT-based media has been found to increase students’ engagement, motivation, and understanding, although teachers may still face technical and operational challenges in its implementation (Triassanti et al., 2022). Therefore, In the current context, these ICT-based practices can be extended to AI-supported tools, which further assist teachers in improving

instructional effectiveness and confidence.

Finally, the strong demand for professional development identified in both the questionnaire and interview data underscores the need for continuous and context-sensitive TEYL training. Teachers expressed the need for practical guidance, particularly in pronunciation, classroom strategies, and the integration of AI and digital tools in English teaching within the religious values upheld in RA settings (Hamid et al., 2022). This study contributes to the existing literature by providing insight into the experiences of generalist teachers in a religious-based early childhood education context. Although the study is limited to a single institutional setting, the findings offer valuable implications for future research, including studies involving broader educational contexts, parental perspectives, and the impact of targeted teacher training on instructional practices.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that teachers at RA YKU 02 hold positive perceptions toward AI-assisted English language teaching, viewing it as an important component for children's holistic development. English is regarded as a means to foster confidence and readiness for future education—a view shared by 4 out of 4 participants—while remaining compatible with the religious values of Raudhatul Athfal. These findings highlight that age-appropriate instructional strategies, particularly Total Physical Response (TPR) which was supported by 4 out of 4 teachers, as well as songs, games, visual media, and AI-supported tools (3 out of 4 teachers), are perceived as effective in supporting meaningful English learning.

However, teachers face psychological and systemic challenges, including limited instructional time, insufficient teaching media, and limited access to AI-based resources—identified as major obstacles by 4 out of 4 participants—as well as low linguistic self-confidence. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrate agency by utilizing digital and AI-supported resources such as YouTube and Digital TV. The strong demand for professional development from all participants indicates the need for continuous, context-sensitive TEYL training, particularly in integrating AI and digital tools. Overall, this study contributes empirical insights from a religious-based context, suggesting the need for further research and institutional support to ensure sustainable and technology-integrated English instruction.

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