



Social interaction in second language acquisition: A case study at a Semarang kindergarten

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Abstract

Social interaction plays a critical and foundational role in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), particularly during early childhood when language learning occurs naturally through daily engagement. In multilingual environments such as Indonesia, where children are exposed to more than one language from a young age, the dynamics of social interaction become especially relevant. Despite extensive literature supporting the value of interaction in SLA, limited studies have focused on learners in hybrid, lab school models that combine formal instruction with informal, play-based learning. This study addresses that gap by exploring how social interaction facilitates English language development among children aged 3 to 6 at one kindergarten in the city of Semarang. A qualitative case study approach was adopted, utilizing classroom observations and teacher interviews to gather rich, contextual data. The findings reveal that peer conversations, structured group tasks, and incidental interactions with teachers and visiting foreigners provide essential opportunities for language input, output, and feedback. Teachers' scaffolding strategies, aligned with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, helped students transition from guided participation to independent language use. Nevertheless, challenges such as differing proficiency levels, passive learners, and limited time hindered optimal implementation. The study concludes that fostering interaction-rich environments is essential in early SLA and that effective instructional strategies must be adaptive and inclusive. These insights have important implications for educators, curriculum designers, and policy makers seeking to enhance language development in diverse early education settings, particularly within multilingual and hybrid learning environments.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a vital tool of communication, thought, and relating to others for humans. The development of language is rapid and foundational in the early years of life and proceeds to cognitive maturation, emotional expressiveness, and skill in interacting with others. In bilingual societies, such as in Indonesia, where children are exposed to second languages from very early ages, the development of a second language is not only normal but also educationally significant. Second Language Acquisition (SLA), particularly for children in kindergarten or playgroup settings, is shaped by various internal and external factors, including exposure, motivation, cognitive development, and crucially, social interaction (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Social interaction is widely recognized as a core mechanism in SLA. For very young learners those in early childhood education settings such as playgroups and kindergartens verbal and non-verbal exchanges with peers, teachers, and caregivers serve as the primary means of acquiring new language forms. These interactions, which often occur in informal, playful, or routine contexts, allow children to receive comprehensible input, produce language, and obtain feedback, all of which are essential for language development (Robbins, 1995). At this age, language learning is not merely instructional; it is experiential and embedded in everyday social participation.

Sociocultural theories of learning, especially those developed by Lev Vygotsky, provide a robust theoretical foundation for understanding the role of social interaction in early SLA. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that learning in young children is socially mediated and occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where children can achieve higher levels of performance through guided participation with more capable peers or adults. Complementary to this is Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis, which highlights that language development is enhanced through modified interaction and negotiation of meaning. These perspectives agree that social communication is not only helpful but also necessary for young learners learning a second language.

Recent research confirms these theoretical assertions, suggesting that interactive environments hasten language development in early children. According to research, when early learners participate in storytelling, group games, guided talks, and cooperative play, their vocabulary, sentence structure, and communicative competence improve dramatically (Khusnaini, 2019; Apriyanti & Diana, 2019). These participatory techniques reflect normal developmental patterns in which toddlers learn language through immersion in socially rich situations.

Despite this amount of evidence, there is still a lack in study, particularly in the context of hybrid learning approaches like lab schools. These educational environments blend structured and informal learning to provide a unique environment for studying SLA in early childhood. The One of kindergartens in the city of Semarang is an example of a setting in which young students in kindergarten or playgroup participate in both structured educational activities and spontaneous social interactions. However, not much study has been completed to understand how different types of contact contribute to SLA in children aged 3 to 6, particularly in Indonesia.

Indonesia's varied linguistic landscape makes it a perfect setting for studying second language learning in young children. As a country with one of the world's highest levels of linguistic diversity, children are most often exposed to many languages within their families and communities from a young age. The One of kindergartens in the city of Semarang operates within this environment and offers a structured yet flexible learning space where children of diverse linguistic backgrounds come together and communicate on a daily basis. This becomes a unique site for observing how social interaction, whether intentional or not, supports SLA in early learners.

While previous studies have focused on primary school-aged children or adolescents, fewer have examined how interaction shapes SLA in kindergarten or playgroup-aged learners. Yet this developmental stage is critical. Language learning during this period is highly sensitive, and the neurological plasticity of young children allows them to absorb new languages more naturally than older learners. Therefore, investigating how interactional practices at the One of kindergartens in the city of Semarang contribute to SLA in this age group fills a significant research gap.

The present study offers a novel contribution by focusing specifically on how social interaction supports SLA at One of kindergartens in the city of Semarang. By drawing from Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Long's Interaction Hypothesis, the study explores how teacher-child conversations, peer play, and guided activities promote language development in a multilingual educational context. Unlike prior research, which often isolates instruction from interaction, this study recognizes the interconnected nature of play, communication, and cognitive development in early language learning.

The relevance of this research lies in its potential to inform teaching practices and curriculum development in early childhood education. Understanding how social interaction supports SLA in kindergarten and playgroup learners can help educators design developmentally appropriate, interaction-rich learning environments. Additionally, the study may offer policy insights for enhancing language learning programs in multilingual early childhood institutions across Indonesia.

To guide the research, two research questions are posed: (1) How does social interaction influence second language acquisition among kindergarten or playgroup learners at One of kindergartens in the city of Semarang? and (2) What challenges do educators face in leveraging social interaction to promote SLA in early childhood learners? These questions will direct the analysis of interactional practices in real classroom and play settings within the one of kindergarten in the city of Semarang.

This research adopts a qualitative, observational methodology to capture the naturalistic social interactions that occur in the Lab School's early childhood programs. The participants are children aged 3 to 6 years, and the focus is on school-based interactions, particularly in teacher-guided play, peer collaboration, and informal conversations. Importantly, the research prioritizes communicative ability and involvement over standardized test results, acknowledging that language development at this stage is best understood through social participation.

By focusing on interactional dynamics in early childhood, this research adds to previous findings while providing a context-specific viewpoint. Previous study, such as that by Nurjaleka (2021), has studied multilingual development through family contact, whereas studies by Apriyanti and Diana (2019) and Khusnaini (2019) have shown how classroom discourse and play-based learning help SLA. However, few have addressed how these processes unfold in lab schools or with children under the age of six, making this investigation particularly timely and significant.

Furthermore, the study incorporates the principles of input and output theories in SLA. Krashen's Input Hypothesis emphasizes the need for comprehensible input, while Swain's Output Hypothesis underscores the importance of language production and feedback. Both of these processes occur naturally through social interaction in early childhood, where children receive linguistic input from teachers and peers, test their linguistic hypotheses, and adjust their speech based on feedback.

In summary, this study aims to enrich the understanding of how SLA occurs among kindergarten and playgroup-aged learners in a multilingual setting through interaction. It provides a theoretical and practical contribution by connecting social interaction with early language development, grounded in real experiences at One of kindergartens in the city of Semarang. The study not only adds to academic literature but also has the potential to improve early childhood education practices in Indonesia and other multilingual contexts.

METHODS

This case study investigates how social contact helps young learners learn English as a second language at one kindergarten in the city of Semarang. This technique, which focuses on real-life classroom situations, helped capture the natural flow of conversation and how it relates to language development in early childhood environments. The participants in this study were kindergarten students and English teachers

Data were gathered using two primary methods: an observation checklist and a set of interview questions. Both instruments were founded on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, specifically fundamental notions such as learning through interaction with others, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and how language use transitions from social to internal. The checklist directed observations of how students interacted with peers and teachers in English, how teachers encouraged English use, and if students demonstrated signs of independent learning after receiving assistance. Observations were conducted during regular class activities, playtime, and special programs such as English Club. Interviews were held with teachers to have a better understanding of their opinions. These conversations centered on their teaching tactics, experiences, and obstacles, all while encouraging students to use English through social interaction. Questions covered how they differentiated their instruction at different levels, how they engaged less active pupils, and how external influences, such as visiting international students, influenced the children's education.

The information was obtained over numerous school days to represent a wide range of classroom scenarios. Field notes and interviews were taken and documented during this time to ensure accuracy. All acquired data was then evaluated and analyzed thematically. Patterns emerged on how peer interaction influenced language use, the significance of teacher support, how children

progressed from guided practice to independent speaking, and the day-to-day obstacles faced by teachers.

To ensure that the instruments were appropriate and reliable, an English language education specialist reviewed them. The feedback centered on the content's relevance, how well the questions mirrored the theory, and if the language used was clear and acceptable for the age group. Prior to using the tools in the field, revisions were made based on this feedback.

Overall, this multi-method strategy enabled the researchers to gain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of how everyday social interactions serve as a key mechanism for second language acquisition in early childhood education. By observing children interacting in natural settings, such as free play, structured classroom discussions, teacher-led activities, and special programs such as English Club, the researchers were able to capture the dynamic and often spontaneous ways in which young learners use and engage with English. While seemingly routine, these interactions have proven to be valuable pathways to language acquisition—they provide students with authentic opportunities to receive input, experiment with output, and receive feedback in a socially supportive environment.

In addition, combining the observational data with insights from teacher interviews added a deeper layer of interpretation to the findings. Teachers' reflections helped contextualize classroom behaviors and inform specific instructional decisions, such as using songs, visual aids, gestures, and differentiated tasks to encourage diverse learners to use English. The interviews also revealed the deliberate facilitation strategies that the teachers employed to guide students from dependent, guided practice to independent, confident language use—in line with Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) development.

This holistic approach to data collection and analysis allowed the researchers to identify not only what children said and did in specific social contexts, but also how and why they did so. Thematic analysis of this massive dataset revealed clear patterns: peer interactions fostered risk-taking and natural language skills, teacher modeling provided important language input, and repetitive learning in meaningful contexts (such as everyday life) enhanced retention and confidence. Together, these factors support the conclusion that young children's English learning is most effective when embedded in social interactions, emotional support, and contextually relevant experiences.

In essence, the research strategy employed in this study was critical in uncovering the subtle yet powerful role of everyday interactions in promoting second language acquisition. This suggests that language acquisition is not limited to formal classroom instruction, but can also flourish in the informal, playful, and connected moments of a well-structured kindergarten classroom.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Children Learn from Others First

Young learners acquire English through interaction with peers and teachers. This study revealed that both peer and teacher interactions significantly contributed to students' initial exposure and use of English. Based on classroom observations, students were seen initiating English use during peer play and group activities. Teachers also played a central role in providing models of English use, especially in structured learning settings.

"If it's in the school environment, of course, they first learn from the teacher. But outside, it might be from their parents. Sometimes children who enter Lab School already have some English, so we adjust based on their prior exposure." (Participant 1, Interview)

The teacher highlighted that while classroom engagement was important for everyone, pupils who had prior experience at home progressed more quickly. Before children internalized the language, teachers created exercises that let them gain social skills. During both structured classroom activities and free play sessions, children were frequently observed using simple English expressions such as *"What is this?"*, *"My turn!"*, *"Look at me!"*, and *"Can I play?"*. These words emerged as a result of frequent exposure and social modeling from teachers and peers during meaningful interactions, rather than formal grammatical instruction. For example, a teacher might ask, *"What is this?"* during a role-playing exercise or while the children are playing with toys, and they would have to answer. Students eventually started utilizing the phrase independently, impulsively, and contextually. Example transcript

Teacher: "What is this?"
Student A (imitating): "What is this?"
Student B: "It's a car!"
(Later during free play)
Student A (to a peer): "What is this?"

This natural and repetitive use of language exemplifies how youngsters learn new phrases through active social interaction. This discovery clearly demonstrates a fundamental tenet of Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, specifically the notion that language and cognitive development initially take place on a social level before internalizing on an individual basis. Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level by Vygotsky, (1978), p. 57. Language is originally perceived in this sense as an external communication instrument used in interactions with others. Children gradually use these language expressions on their own after being exposed to and participating in them repeatedly. The method is also consistent with the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which states that a youngster can complete a task with help before learning to do it on their own. Students first had to rely on hearing the sentences from other people. As a result of repeated exposure, students started using the terms on their own without being reminded, indicating that they had integrated them into their internal language system. The transformation of interpersonal processes into intrapersonal ones is the result of a long series of developmental events by Vygotsky (1978), p. 56. These findings highlight that second language acquisition in early learners is most effective when embedded in meaningful, socially-driven contexts, rather than formal instruction alone. Teachers who consistently model language in engaging ways enable students to internalize not just vocabulary, but also its functional use. This aligns with Lantolf & Thorne's (2006) interpretation of Vygotskian theory, which emphasizes language learning is not the transmission of vocabulary and grammar, but a process of participating in socially situated language use that becomes internalized as personal understanding (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 17). The student's ability to later use the phrase "*What is this?*" in a different context, without prompting, demonstrates that social interaction was the starting point for meaningful language acquisition.

Language Starts Outside Then Becomes Inner Thinking

One of the study's most notable conclusions is the importance of social connection in commencing language creation in early learners. Rather than learning English in isolation, students at One of kindergartens in the city of Semarang were frequently observed using socially structured cue such as instructor prompts, songs, chants, and routine greetings to stimulate their language use. These external stimuli supplied linguistic information and contextual meaning, encouraging learners to express themselves verbally even in the early stages of development. As students encountered recurrent patterns of interaction, they began to recreate the language independently, indicating a shift from socially supported to self-initiated use. This was well highlighted by one of the teachers questioned, who saw the spontaneous character of student replies when exposed to familiar social triggers.

"We often stimulate students through direct conversation. For example, when someone asks 'How are you today?', they respond spontaneously, telling about their day in English." (Participant 1, Interview)

Such direct experiences, framed as everyday exchanges rather than formal instruction, enabled students to internalize language through use. The repetition of phrases in regular social routines allowed pupils to not only learn statements, but also understand their communication purpose and use them in different contexts.

An example from the classroom supports this finding. A student responded to the inquiry, "What do you see?" with, "I see a cat." While this term was initially used to steer students through the teacher's modeled structure, it returned during an unstructured picture-book reading session. The identical pupil, unprompted, pointed to an image and stated, "I see a dog." This transfer of language to a new setting without scaffolding shows a deeper level of internalization, in which formerly external, socially driven language is integrated into the child's own linguistic arsenal.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Guided support leads to gradual independence in language use. Teachers consciously scaffolded children's English learning, first modeling the target language, then encouraging students to use it independently. The process was gradual and attentive to individual readiness.

"Yes, I give them a model first using songs, gestures, or expressions. Once they're used to it, I let them use it during play or when responding to friends." (Participant 1, Interview)

In a role-play activity, after the teacher modeled the phrase "Can I have the red ball?", students adapted the structure to their own context, saying "Can I have the blue car?" demonstrating their growing ability to apply language creatively; however, some students remained reliant on teacher support longer, reflecting individual differences in progressing through the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978).

"Some students tend to rely on help longer, especially the shy ones. But with consistent support, they eventually try on their own." (Participant 1, Interview)

This supports Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, in which learners first rely on assistance but eventually achieve independent performance as scaffolding is consciously and gradually eliminated.

Learning Happens in Social Situations

Social engagement drives language practice and improvement. Social situations such as English Club, group play, and performance-based events (like storytelling or graduation shows) created meaningful contexts for language use. Repeated exposure in such contexts enabled noticeable progress.

"We use events like graduation to have students perform in English like storytelling. It helps them gain confidence and use what they've learned in front of an audience." (Participant 1, Interview)

During classroom observations, it was found that students used English more frequently during playtime and interactive group activities. Children were more likely to start English phrases on their own when the context was less formal, as during games or unstructured play. Phrases like "Let's go here!" "I win!" and "Come with me!" were frequently used in an unplanned manner, particularly when engaging in game-based activities like role-playing, running games, or utilizing toys in small groups. These expressions frequently surfaced without the teacher's assistance, suggesting a more organic use of language. The teacher noted that students became more active and confident in speaking English when the learning environment was fun, playful, and relaxed. Students seemed more inclined to participate and take chances while utilizing English when lessons were presented through storytelling, music, or games. According to the instructor, engaging situations helped students feel less anxious and made learning a language feel more like play than a test. Children conversed more freely as a result, demonstrating the critical role that an emotionally supportive setting plays in the learning of second languages. This finding confirms Vygotsky's (1978) thesis that learning occurs most efficiently in meaningful social interactions. Children readily learn and start using new language forms when they engage in pleasurable, group activities. Students can eventually internalize the language and utilize it on their own by using it frequently in certain social situations.

"I try to build love for the language first. If they like English, they'll learn faster and be more active." (Participant 1, Interview)

This finding indicates that when youngsters participate in engaging and important social activities, they learn English more effectively. They speak English more fluently and naturally when they converse with friends or play games. During play, saying things like "Let's go here" or "I win!" aids in their comprehension and retention of the language. Students gradually become fluent in the language through these types of frequent and interesting encounters. This bolsters Vygotsky's theory that social interaction is the primary means of learning. Children's thinking and language skills are developed from the outside in when they engage with others.

An example from the classroom supports this finding. A student responded to the inquiry, "What do you see?" with, "I see a cat." While this term was initially used to steer students through the

teacher's modeled structure, it returned during an unstructured picture-book reading session. The identical pupil, unprompted, pointed to an image and stated, *"I see a dog."* This transfer of language to a new setting without scaffolding shows a deeper level of internalization, in which formerly external, socially driven language is integrated into the child's own linguistic arsenal.

This process is consistent with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of language development, which holds that speech and thought stem from social interaction. Vygotsky (1978) states that all higher mental functions arise in a social context (interpsychological) before becoming part of the individual's internal world (intrapsychological). In the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a learner can accomplish a function with the assistance of a more competent individual (such as a teacher or peer), and via repeated engagement, that function becomes self-executing.

The observed and reported instances show this metamorphosis in action: students first used social discourse as a framework for their responses, but those phrases transformed over time into self-regulated language use. These findings confirm that second language acquisition for young learners is a socially mediated process that occurs through participation in meaningful, interactive environments, rather than repetition or exposure.

Challenges in Facilitating Social Interaction

Individual differences, classroom management, and student confidence hinder optimal interaction. Despite the strategies in place, the teacher faced several challenges, especially related to student diversity.

"The challenge is the difference in language abilities some students already know English, others are new. Some even need special support like hearing aids." (Participant 1, Interview)

Time and individual attention were also major issues in facilitating effective social interaction.

"Large class sizes make it hard to give individual guidance. Some students need extra encouragement to join in." (Participant 1, Interview)

When the teacher urged them to react, some students were reluctant to use English. They frequently nodded, made hand signals, or remained mute in response to questions rather than speaking. This demonstrates that even in a supportive setting, not every kid feels comfortable or prepared to speak. This situation reflects a common reality in second language classrooms. Not all students benefit from social interaction alone when it comes to speaking. For certain kids to feel more ease speaking English, they might require additional time, assistance, or a different method. Vygotsky's hypothesis, according to which every child has a unique Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), is supported by this. In order for learning to occur, the teacher must modify their assistance according to each student's needs. According to this research, interaction-based learning is most effective when the instructor is aware of each student's comfort level and reacts accordingly.

Teacher Scaffolding and Strategic Withdrawal

Teachers carefully balance support and independence to promote autonomous language use. A particularly strong application of ZPD theory was evident in the teacher's scaffolding strategies. She deliberately reduced support over time as students gained confidence and competence.

"At first I sing songs or show pictures, then they follow. Once they are used to it, I let them answer or act it out themselves. I try to reduce my help little by little." (Participant 1, Interview)

During a game session, the teacher pointed to a red block and said, "What color is this?" With a collective "Red!" response, the kids responded. Following some practice, the instructor took a back seat and let the students use different blocks to ask each other the same question. The kids started utilizing the sentence structure independently, altering the color words according to the item. This is a good example of how scaffolding works in language learning. Initially, the instructor provided complete assistance by demonstrating how to pose the question. She then gradually withdrew her assistance and let the students take charge. This is consistent with Vygotsky's theory that learning should occur just before a youngster is capable of doing it on their own. Children can complete things they were previously unable to complete with assistance, but eventually they will be able to accomplish them on their own. The teacher's methodical transition from modeling to peer-led practice

demonstrates how this approach can be effectively applied to second language acquisition in early childhood.

Cognitive Development Through Repetition and Play

Repetition in meaningful contexts strengthens memory and language structure recognition. The teacher noted that repeated exposure through songs, games, and classroom routines helped students solidify their understanding of English expressions.

"We repeat phrases in every session. For example, we always start with greetings like 'Good morning', 'What day is today?'... the kids answer them naturally now." (Participant 1, Interview)

During the daily calendar routine, students were able to speak words such as "Today is Wednesday" and "It is sunny" without assistance from the teacher. They spoke confidently and occasionally modified their phrases to reflect the actual day or the weather, for example, "Today is Friday" or "It is raining." This demonstrated that the kids could use the sentences correctly on their own and grasped their meaning.

Vygotsky's theory that meaningful repetition in social contexts is the most effective way for children to learn is supported by this. The children learned by utilizing the same phrases every day in authentic classroom routines, rather than by memorizing them or practicing them through drills. These frequent and significant encounters eventually assisted the language in being ingrained in their thought processes. As a result, the kids started speaking English organically, incorporating what they had learnt into their inner speech through everyday activities.

Social Interaction and Language Acquisition in Children with Special Needs

Interaction strategies must be tailored for children with hearing impairments and other learning differences. The teacher emphasized the importance of adjusting strategies to accommodate children with special needs, particularly those with hearing difficulties. These students participated in classroom activities but required modified scaffolding approaches and social interaction formats.

"The challenge is the different levels of ability, especially for children who wear hearing aids. They need a different approach to ensure they can still engage with classmates." (Participant 1, Interview)

Instead of listening, one kid with a hearing device was observed carefully observing the teacher's mouth. When the teacher spoke slowly, made hand gestures, and displayed words on cards, the pupil was better able to understand. This made the lesson easier for the student to follow. Additionally, the instructor ensured that the student felt welcomed in the classroom. In order to allow the student to participate in group games and chat with friends, she modified some of the activities while working with an assistance. The pupil was not excluded in this way. This demonstrates that hearing words alone is not enough to learn a language. It also entails assisting every student in feeling supported, safe, and included. According to Vygotsky, children learn best when they engage with others and receive the support they require.

"I work with the classroom assistant and adjust how I talk, like making my articulation clearer or writing down the words. It helps the child feel included." (Participant 1, Interview)

During singing time, the teacher allowed the student with a hearing aid to lead the hand movements as the other children sang. Even if the student didn't hear every word, this enabled them to participate in the exercise. The pupil felt content and part of the group. This demonstrates the various methods in which educators can support each student. According to Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), children learn best when they have the proper support. Support from friends, hand signals, or visuals might be helpful for students with special needs. When all children can work together, learning occurs most effectively. All of the pupils can learn and develop when the teacher adapts the activity to suit everyone. This supports the notion put forth by Vygotsky that social engagement is how children learn.

Discussion

These findings show that Vygotsky's theories continue to provide useful insights into how youngsters learn language. Children start using English in social situations, especially with their teachers and peers, before they are able to use it on their own, according to classroom observations and interviews. This shift in language use from requiring assistance to being independent is a reflection of what Vygotsky (1978) called the shift from interpsychological to intrapsychological development.

These findings substantially support sociocultural theory and are consistent with Lantolf and Thorne's (2006) argument that language learning is changed by active involvement in socially situated practices rather than solitary teaching. The relevance of informal, socially mediated language development in early childhood was also highlighted by Robbins (1995), which is consistent with this study's finding of unplanned English use during group rituals and peer play. These findings further support Jašková's (2024) contention that, especially for preschoolers, the sociocultural context is essential for internalizing linguistic patterns.

The kindergarten teachers' approach to encouraging interaction in Semarang is in line with Swain's (2000) Output Hypothesis, which holds that language production is crucial to the development of linguistic accuracy and fluency. Students in this study routinely used English through planned peer activities, storytelling, singing, and classroom routines. These results are consistent with those of Apriyanti and Diana (2019), who discovered that guided interaction greatly improves sentence structure and vocabulary. Likewise, Khusnaini (2019) showed that social settings such as guided instruction and peer collaboration improve students' communicative proficiency and willingness to utilize the second language.

Furthermore, this study backs up Baboza's (2023) assertion that a collaborative connection between a teacher and a student fosters sociocognitive alignment, which is crucial for young and beginning language learners as it provides an emotionally secure atmosphere for language exploration. Language memory is greatly influenced by the emotive component of language usage, such as self-assurance and enjoyment during peer games and performances (Galway et al., 2014).

However, teachers' difficulties in applying such interactive tactics were also evident. Teachers had to constantly adjust due to the presence of passive learners, time limits, and differences in student aptitude. These challenges are consistent with research by Tabors (2008) and García (2009), who highlighted the need for inclusive pedagogy, flexible planning, and customized instruction in linguistically diverse early education classes. Almohawes (2024) also emphasizes how crucial it is to apply SLA theory to actual classroom situations, especially in multicultural contexts. This is seen from the way the study's teachers adjusted the exercises according to the sociocultural backgrounds, prior exposure, and response of the students.

Teachers' use of scaffolding emerged as a key educational method. They first used gestures, visual aids, and routines to mimic expressions and structures before progressively letting students take charge. This approach is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which states that when students are assisted by a more experienced person, they can perform at a level above their existing capabilities. Shan's (2024) analysis of Bruner's scaffolding technique, which emphasizes the significance of prompt teacher support withdrawal to promote independence, is similarly consistent with these findings.

This study supports Cappellini's (2016) conclusions that scaffolding needs to be responsive and dynamic rather than static. As can be seen, teachers here used different scaffolding for more passive or introverted students, which is consistent with Esteve-Gibert's (2021) findings that multimodal instruction helps students with diverse processing styles. For instance, UNESCO's (2012) recommendations for inclusive early childhood education advocated the use of written prompts, clear articulation, and slower speech by children with hearing impairments.

Compared to previous studies, this study sheds new light on SLA among children aged 3-6 in hybrid, play-based learning environments. This study stresses spontaneous language usage in informal and interactive circumstances, while the majority of SLA studies have concentrated on older learners or structured instruction (Denbaum-Restrepo, 2023; Verga, 2017). According to Djordjevic (2023), who urged for more empirical evidence on SLA in preschool settings, particularly in linguistically varied countries, the findings close the research gap.

In addition, although Denbaum (2020) noted that immersion in real-world social settings overseas speeds up sociolinguistic learning, our study demonstrates that, with the right scaffolding of interaction, comparable gains may be made in play-based, localized situations. This discrepancy shows that regulated social engagement in formal early education settings can provide similar developmental effects when properly facilitated, even though immersion contexts are still beneficial.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that social interaction is a fundamental process in the early development of second language proficiency as well as a teaching strategy. These interactions become potent learning opportunities when accompanied by deliberate, responsive instruction. In addition to demonstrating that effective interaction, when scaffolded, varied, and inclusive, can foster not only linguistic proficiency but also motivation, engagement, and learner identity construction (Alshatti, 2022), these findings corroborate earlier findings that language development must be socially grounded (Hall, 2019; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

To optimize the impact of such interactions, educators must maintain flexibility, responsiveness, and inclusivity. In order to address the varied needs of students, schools must also give teachers access to institutional support, reduced class sizes, and sufficient training. Interaction-rich environments can only then fulfill their function as the cornerstone of successful early SLA.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to understand how social interaction influences English language acquisition in young learners at One of kindergartens in the city of Semarang and what challenges teachers face in that process. The results clearly show that meaningful social interaction whether with teachers, peers, or others creates the ideal environment for young children to acquire language naturally and effectively.

The purpose of this research was not only to observe what happens in the classroom, but to explore how those interactions support learning. As seen through the lens of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, students moved from guided practice to independent language use, illustrating the strength of socially constructed learning.

On a practical level, the study points to the need for classrooms that foster both structured and spontaneous interaction. Teachers are encouraged to use methods that combine peer learning, group collaboration, and guided support. It also highlights the need for schools to support teachers with enough time, resources, and training to handle the variety of learners in their classrooms.

For future research, longer-term studies could show how these interactional patterns influence language growth over time. It would also be valuable to explore how support from home and exposure to English outside of school adds to this process. Lastly, including students' own voices in future studies could give an even deeper look at how they experience language learning through interaction.

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