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Abstract

Oral language is central to young children's participation, learning, and later educational opportunity. This study reports the baseline stage of a planned classroom action research project examining structured teacher–child questioning in a rural Indonesian early childhood education and care (ECEC) center. Aggregate baseline records for 15 children aged 5–6 years were analyzed descriptively. Seven children (46.7%) were classified as Not Yet Developing, six (40.0%) as Emerging, two (13.3%) as Developing as Expected, and none as Very Well Developed in the center's existing language-development framework. Eight children were reported to experience participation barriers, including delayed responses to educator questions ($n = 5$), unclear speech articulation ($n = 2$), and limited spontaneous verbal initiation ($n = 1$). The manuscript translates these findings into a two-cycle questioning protocol that prioritizes open prompts, wait time, contingent expansion, peer uptake, and brief observation records. The contribution is an equity-oriented framework for widening oral-language participation in rural ECEC, rather than a claim of intervention efficacy. Because no Cycle I or Cycle II outcome data were available in the source records, causal improvement is not inferred. Future implementation should report child-level, de-identified trajectories, intervention fidelity, and safeguarding procedures.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education; Equitable Participation; Oral Language; Rural Education; Structured Questioning.

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a foundational social investment because children's early learning opportunities influence participation, wellbeing, and later educational trajectories. International evidence frames responsive caregiving, stimulation, and access to quality early learning as mutually reinforcing conditions for development rather than as separate services [1], [2], [3]. Oral language is particularly consequential because it enables children to enter social exchanges, understand classroom directions, negotiate with peers, and make their thinking visible to adults.

Language development is shaped by the social contexts in which children participate and by the quality of language addressed to them [4], [5]. Both the amount and the quality of child-directed talk matter for vocabulary development [6], while the interactive, linguistic, and conceptual properties of adult input provide complementary pathways for language learning [7]. A meta-analysis likewise indicates that the quality and quantity of parental linguistic input are positively associated with children's language skills [8]. Social interaction is not merely a delivery channel for words; it supports children's attention, interpretation, and willingness to contribute [9].

Structured conversation is therefore a plausible classroom resource for widening young children's oral-language participation. Dialogic picture-book reading and related conversational interventions have improved language-related outcomes by inviting children to respond, elaborating their contributions, and revisiting ideas [10], [11], [12], [13], [14]. These approaches are relevant to questioning pedagogy because their central mechanism is not the presence of a question alone, but a reciprocal sequence in which the adult notices, waits for, interprets, and extends the child's response.

The present study retains the original proposal's focus on question-and-answer pedagogy while repositioning it as structured teacher–child questioning. This clarification is important: a recitation-style sequence that privileges rapid, predetermined answers can suppress participation, whereas questions that are concrete, open, developmentally calibrated, and followed by responsive expansion can create access to talk. Indonesian classroom action research has reported gains in oral-language development when question-and-answer activity is supported by illustrated word cards [15]. Related local classroom research also indicates that guided storytelling with visual media can strengthen young children's speaking opportunities [16], and Indonesian scholarship on question-and-answer methods emphasizes the instructional value of direct two-way dialogue [17].

However, questions are only productive when they are embedded in a language-rich interaction. Preschool teacher–child conversations contribute to vocabulary development [18], and multiple dimensions of the classroom linguistic environment are associated with children's language growth [19]. Teacher input can predict preschool lexical growth [20], while the quality of educators' language in early childhood classrooms varies substantially in complexity, diversity, and responsiveness [21], [22]. A recent systematic review further concludes that the purposes, places, and participants involved in teacher language practices must be considered when linking classroom talk to child oral-language outcomes [23].

Research on shared reading offers specific guidance for designing questioning sequences. Teachers' questions influence whether children provide meaningful responses [24],

and literal as well as inferential prompts can elicit different forms of child talk [25]. Classroom conversations are strengthened when educators support turn-taking, build on children's contributions, and create a predictable interactional structure [26]. Vocabulary-focused teacher talk before, during, and after shared reading provides another model for connecting questions with explanation and repetition [27]. Adult responsiveness is especially important for toddlers and preschoolers because a child's partial response can be treated as a starting point for expansion rather than as an error [28].

The form of the question also matters. Children's own questions and educators' responses are associated with opportunities for follow-up engagement across diverse preschool settings [29]. Wh-questions have been linked to toddlers' language and cognitive development beyond the effect of input quantity [30], and inferential input has been related to children's language skills [31]. Evidence also suggests that the association between adult question use and child language can vary according to children's vocabulary skills and socioeconomic context [32]. These findings support an approach that combines accessible prompts with adjustable levels of linguistic and conceptual challenge.

This study is situated within inclusive and equitable early-learning practice. Classroom interaction quality predicts children's language and academic development [33], and large-scale evidence supports a developmental framework in which teacher–child interactions are central to effective instruction [34]. Program ratings and educator professional development have also been linked to meaningful variation in children's learning opportunities [35], [36]. Because participation is co-constructed, analyses of teacher–child play talk [37], the language quality experienced by dual-language learners [38], classroom conversation as a long-term language resource [39], and recent work on advanced wh-questions in diverse ECEC settings [40] are all relevant to an equity-oriented intervention.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) with an embedded descriptive-quantitative reporting component. CAR was selected because the study addresses a locally identified instructional problem and is intended to support systematic, intentional refinement of teaching practice through evidence from the classroom [40]. The design comprised two prospective iterative cycles, each organized through planning, action and observation, and reflection. Rather than using a cross-sectional survey, latent-variable modeling, or a comparison-group experiment, the design focuses on within-classroom improvement in children's observed oral-language participation.

The present manuscript reports the verified baseline stage and the protocol for the two action cycles. The source record did not contain Cycle I or Cycle II outcome data, individual child trajectories, or completed fidelity records. Accordingly, the article does not test intervention effectiveness or make causal claims; it presents a transparent baseline analysis and an implementation-ready action-research design.

Research Setting and Time

The study was situated at Harapan Ibu Kindergarten in Batang Asai Subdistrict, Sarolangun Regency, Jambi Province, Indonesia. For international reporting, the setting is described as a rural Indonesian early childhood education and care (ECEC) center. The original proposal uses the local term Taman Kanak-Kanak; this manuscript retains the official name at first mention and subsequently uses ECEC center. The research concern was limited oral-language participation during classroom activity, including delayed responses to educator prompts, unclear speech articulation as reported by the educator, and low spontaneous verbal initiation.

The source proposal is dated 2024, but it does not record the precise dates or duration of baseline observation, Cycle I, or Cycle II. The study period is therefore reported only as the 2024 proposal stage. No dates have been reconstructed or inferred beyond the documentation available in the source record.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were children enrolled in the target Group B classroom. A total-class sampling approach was used because the action was designed for the classroom in which the instructional problem was identified, rather than for statistical generalization to a wider population. The preliminary-observation record reports 15 children, comprising 10 girls and 5 boys. A separate paragraph in the source proposal refers to 17 children, but its stated sex subtotal is 14 (6 boys and 8 girls).

To preserve data integrity, all descriptive results in this manuscript use the internally consistent baseline cohort of $n = 15$, because both the reported sex distribution and the developmental-category frequencies total 15. No child-level inclusion or exclusion register, absenteeism record, age distribution, language-background profile, or developmental history was supplied. The analysis consequently remains at the aggregate classroom level and treats the discrepancy as a reporting limitation rather than silently correcting it.

Data Collection Procedure

The verified baseline evidence consisted of aggregate developmental-category counts, an educator narrative describing eight children with salient participation barriers, and the original planned observation domains. The baseline categories were Belum Berkembang (BB), translated as Not Yet Developing (NYD); Mulai Berkembang (MB), translated as Emerging (EM); Berkembang Sesuai Harapan (BSH), translated as Developing as Expected (DE); and Berkembang Sangat Baik (BSB), translated as Very Well Developed (VWD). These categories were retained as local developmental descriptors and were not interpreted as clinical diagnoses.

For the prospective action cycles, the original proposal specified classroom observation, educator observation sheets, child-response records, field notes, open-ended educator interviews, and classroom documentation. The revised protocol organizes these materials into four evidence sources: (1) child language observation sheets aligned with Table 1; (2) educator implementation records documenting prompts, wait time, expansion, and peer invitations; (3) reflective field notes and educator interviews; and (4) non-identifying classroom documentation. Pre-test and post-test scores were not available in the supplied record and are not reported.

Data Analysis

Baseline data were analyzed descriptively by calculating the frequency (n) and percentage of children in each developmental category using $\text{Percentage} = n/N \times 100$, where $N = 15$. Aggregate narrative indicators of participation barriers were also summarized as frequencies and percentages of the baseline cohort. No inferential test, regression model, structural equation model, or effect size was estimated because the verified dataset is small, aggregated, lacks a comparison group, and contains no completed post-intervention observations.

For a completed two-cycle CAR study, the same descriptive categories would be compared across baseline, Cycle I, and Cycle II, while observation notes and educator reflections would be organized through data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. However, no cycle-level observations, child-level trajectories, or interview transcripts were supplied; the present report therefore limits its analysis to the verified baseline record and does not reconstruct missing outcome data.

Ethical Considerations

The source proposal documents intended school access but does not provide an ethics approval number, guardian-consent record, child-assent procedure, or data-management protocol. The present manuscript therefore reports only aggregate, de-identified baseline information and makes no child-level or diagnostic claims. Any subsequent implementation should obtain institutional authorization where required, written consent from parents or guardians, age-appropriate child assent, secure storage of observation records, and a referral pathway for children whose speech, hearing, or communication concerns require professional assessment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Baseline Cohort and Record Integrity

Table 1 presents the baseline context and the reconciliation rule used for this report. The decision to analyze the 15-child cohort is methodological rather than substantive: it is the only cohort for which the source file provides internally consistent totals. This decision protects against the common reporting error of presenting an unverified enrollment number as analytic fact.

Table 1. Baseline Setting, Cohort, and Data-Integrity Profile

Item	Reported value	Analytic treatment
Setting	Harapan Ibu Kindergarten, Batang Asai, Sarolangun, Jambi, Indonesia	Reported as a rural Indonesian ECEC center.
Baseline cohort	15 children	Used for all frequencies and percentages.
Sex distribution	10 girls; 5 boys	Sums to 15 and is therefore retained.
Alternative count in source	17 children	Not analyzed because the stated sex subtotal is 14.
Available evidence	Aggregate baseline categories and narrative barriers	No Cycle I or Cycle II outcomes were supplied.

Baseline Oral-Language Developmental Profile

The baseline distribution indicates that 13 of 15 children (86.7%) were classified below the center's Developing as Expected category. The largest group was Not Yet Developing (46.7%), followed by Emerging (40.0%). Only two children (13.3%) were classified as Developing as Expected, and no child was classified as Very Well Developed. These figures establish a clear need for expanded oral-language participation opportunities, but they do not establish a language disorder, a cause of difficulty, or an intervention effect.

Table 2. Baseline Oral-Language Developmental Categories

Center Category	International Reporting Label	N	%
BB (Belum Berkembang)	Not Yet Developing (NYD)	7	46.7
MB (Mulai Berkembang)	Emerging (EM)	6	40.0
BSH (Berkembang Sesuai Harapan)	Developing as Expected (DE)	2	13.3
BSB (Berkembang Sangat Baik)	Very Well Developed (VWD)	0	0.0
Total		15	100.0

Observed Barriers to Oral-Language Participation

The source narrative identifies eight children with a salient participation barrier. Five children were described as taking a long time to respond when questioned by the educator, two were described as having unclear speech articulation, and one was described as quiet and rarely speaking with the educator or peers. These categories sum to eight, but the original record does not provide individual profiles, duration of observation, hearing information, home-language information, or evidence that barriers were mutually exclusive. The frequencies should therefore be read as a practical planning signal, not as prevalence estimates.

Table 3. Narrative Baseline Indicators of Limited Oral-Language Participation

Reported Indicator	N	% Of Cohort	Interpretive Boundary
Delayed response to educator questions	5	33.3	May reflect processing time, confidence, question accessibility, or other unmeasured factors.
Unclear speech articulation reported by educator	2	13.3	Not sufficient for clinical classification; requires appropriate professional follow-up if concerns persist.
Low spontaneous verbal initiation / quiet participation	1	6.7	May reflect interactional opportunity, temperament, language confidence, or other unmeasured factors.
Children described with at least one salient barrier	8	53.3	No child-level overlap data were supplied.

Baseline-Responsive Action Design

The empirical result of the baseline analysis is not a post-test gain but a set of clear design requirements. A questioning approach that relies on quick recall answers would not directly address the documented response latency, limited initiation, or need for language expansion. The proposed action sequence therefore emphasizes accessible prompts, deliberate wait time, contingent expansion, peer-mediated uptake, and a brief fidelity record. Figure 1 presents the intended sequence, and Table 4 translates it into observable educator practices.

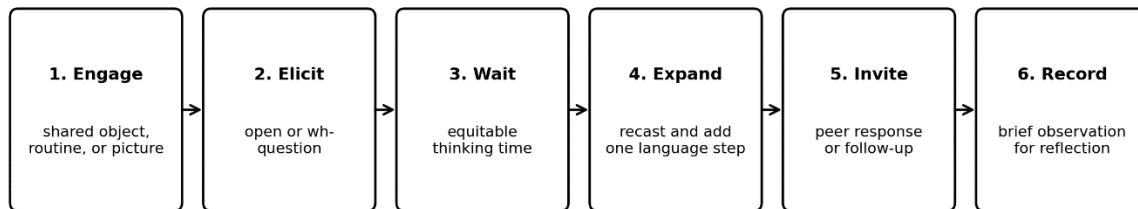


Figure 1. Structured Teacher–Child Questioning Sequence for The Prospective Action Phase
Source: Developed by the author from the baseline findings and evidence on teacher questions, responsive expansion, and child participation [24], [25], [26], [29], [30].

Table 4. Baseline-Responsive Questioning Protocol and Fidelity Indicators

Protocol Component	Educator Action	Child Participation Opportunity	Minimum Fidelity Indicator
Engage	Introduce a familiar object, picture, story event, or routine.	Shared attention and accessible vocabulary.	A meaningful common referent is visible or enacted.
Elicit	Use a concrete, open, or wh-question matched to the child’s current participation level.	Naming, choosing, explaining, predicting, or relating.	At least one non-binary prompt is offered when developmentally appropriate.
Wait	Pause deliberately and maintain a supportive orientation.	Time to process and initiate a response.	Educator provides a measurable pause before rephrasing or answering.
Expand / recast	Repeat the child’s message in a fuller, accurate, or more specific form without shaming.	Modelled vocabulary, syntax, and meaning.	At least one contingent expansion follows each substantive child contribution.
Invite peer uptake	Ask another child to add, agree, contrast, or continue the idea.	Multiple speaking turns and peer listening.	At least one peer-follow-up invitation is made in the activity.
Record and reflect	Write a brief observation after the interaction and	Adaptive support rather than one-size-fits-all instruction.	Record identifies prompt type, child response mode, and next-step support.

Protocol Component	Educator Action	Child Participation Opportunity	Minimum Fidelity Indicator
	review it before the next cycle.		

Discussion

The findings of this study provide compelling empirical evidence that learning-informed agency among women constitutes a central mechanism shaping household well-being. The substantial and statistically significant effect observed in the structural model confirms that women's capacity to mobilize learning experiences into reflective judgment and adaptive action is not merely a complementary factor, but a substantive driver of household stability, emotional security, and resilience. This result extends prior research that has linked women's learning or education to improved family outcomes [21], [22] by demonstrating that it is not learning per se, but learning translated into agency, that yields meaningful social returns. In this sense, the study advances the literature by empirically substantiating learning-informed agency as a measurable construct with explanatory power at the household level.

The baseline pattern suggests an equity issue in classroom participation rather than a simple deficit located within children. When 86.7% of a small classroom cohort is recorded below the center's expected developmental category, the pedagogical question becomes whether everyday interaction gives each child sufficient time, language models, and low-risk opportunities to contribute. Prior work shows that language development is sensitive to social context and to the quality of child-directed input [4], [6], [7]. The present baseline adds a rural Indonesian ECEC case in which response latency and verbal initiation are visible practice concerns alongside vocabulary and pre-literacy indicators.

The first implication is that questioning should be treated as an interactional design problem. Research on teacher-child conversations indicates that vocabulary growth is associated with the quality of exchanges, not merely with educators talking more [18], [19], [20]. The source proposal's original use of a question-and-answer method is therefore retained but refined: the educator must use prompts to open a conversational turn, wait for the child's processing, accept partial communication, and extend meaning. This is consistent with evidence that teacher questions during shared reading relate to child responses [24], that literal and inferential questions prompt different kinds of talk [25], and that responsive conversation can be systematically supported [26], [28].

A second implication concerns question type and progression. Children who are slow to answer may require concrete prompts, visual referents, choice alternatives, repetition, and longer wait time before they are ready for explanatory or inferential questions. Yet the protocol should not confine them permanently to closed responses. Advanced wh-questions and inferential prompts can promote more complex language when scaffolded carefully [30], [31], [40]. The proposed sequence thus moves from engagement and accessible elicitation toward expansion and peer uptake; it does not impose uniform cognitive demand on every child. This adaptation is especially important because adult question use may have different associations with language outcomes across children's vocabulary profiles and social contexts [32].

The third implication is that visual materials should be used as conversational anchors rather than as a substitute for talk. The proposal's literature included Indonesian studies of

question-and-answer instruction with illustrated cards and visual storytelling [15], [16]. Their relevance lies in making a shared referent available to children. However, the mechanism most consistent with international evidence is the dialogic work surrounding the material: adult prompts, child responses, feedback, repetition, and elaboration [10], [11], [12], [13], [14]. A picture card can facilitate joint attention, but it does not by itself guarantee equitable participation.

The novelty of this manuscript is threefold. First, it reframes the original goal from improving a general language score to widening oral-language participation in a rural ECEC classroom. Second, it makes data integrity part of the contribution by resolving the proposal's inconsistent sample counts transparently rather than reporting an unverifiable cohort. Third, it operationalizes structured questioning with fidelity indicators that can be observed and improved across action-research cycles. This moves the study beyond a generic claim that “question and answer” is beneficial and specifies what educators should actually do: provide a shared referent, use calibrated prompts, wait, expand, redistribute turns, and document next steps.

The practical implications are immediate. ECEC leaders can support educators to audit who is invited to speak, which question forms are used, how long adults wait, and whether educators expand children's answers. Such a focus aligns with broader evidence that interaction quality and professional learning are consequential for young children's educational opportunities [33], [34], [35], [36]. It also has relevance for inclusive classrooms, because teacher-child interaction may be especially important for children whose language background or confidence differs from the classroom norm [37], [38], [39]. The protocol can be implemented with low-cost everyday materials, but its effectiveness should be judged by documented change in participation and language indicators, not by anecdote alone.

CONCLUSION

The available baseline evidence identifies limited oral-language participation as a salient concern in one rural Indonesian ECEC classroom: 86.7% of the analyzed cohort was classified below the center's Developing as Expected category, and eight children were described as having delayed responding, unclear articulation, or low verbal initiation. These findings justify a structured teacher-child questioning protocol centered on accessible prompts, wait time, contingent expansion, peer uptake, and reflective observation. The study's contribution is an equity-oriented, implementation-ready framework for action research, not evidence of intervention efficacy. Because Cycle I and Cycle II outcome data were not available, no causal claim of improvement is made. Future work should complete the action cycles with transparent fidelity, safeguarding, and child-level outcome reporting.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations are decisive. The source file contains only aggregate baseline figures, no confirmed intervention dates, no Cycle I or Cycle II observations, no individual trajectories, no comparison condition, and no direct record of intervention fidelity. It also does not provide information needed to interpret articulation concerns, such as hearing status, language exposure, developmental history, or professional assessment. Consequently, the study cannot

claim that structured questioning improved language outcomes. A future completed classroom action research study should report the number and duration of sessions, exact prompts used, child response frequencies, category transitions, inter-observer procedures, educator reflections, consent processes, and any referral or support procedures. This restriction is not a weakness of reporting; it is essential to prevent baseline need from being misrepresented as treatment success.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

N.F. conceptualized the study, developed the research design, coordinated data collection, and contributed to the initial drafting of the manuscript. J. contributed to the development of the methodology, data validation, interpretation of the findings, and manuscript review. F.N.S. supported data collection, conducted data analysis, curated the research data, and contributed to the preparation and revision of the manuscript. H. supervised the research process, contributed to the interpretation of the results, and critically reviewed and revised the manuscript. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript and accept responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

"The authors declare no conflict of interest."

DECLARATION OF USE OF AI IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) for language refinement and structural editing. After using this tool, the authors reviewed, verified, and revised the content as necessary and assume full responsibility for the final manuscript.

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