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# Strategies for Improving Foreign Language Skills of Primary School-Aged Children at Miracle Language Center, Narathiwat, Thailand

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# Abstract:

Foreign language skills are often a problem due to declining interest while the demands of mastering foreign languages include the demands of the times and global competition. These skills are applied to elementary school-age children. The purpose of this study is to describe how strategies to improve foreign language skills of elementary school-age children at Miracle Language Center, Narathiwat, *Thailand*. This research uses field research, namely qualitative-descriptive research design. The research informants consisted of teachers and students. Interviews with teachers to obtain general implementation information and with students to obtain information on the extent of foreign language acquisition at Miracle Language Center educational institutions. The method used is the Miles and Huberman (2014) approach of digging, reviewing data until obtaining saturated data, then all data is collected, data reduction, presenting data and the final step is making conclusions. The results in this study indicate that the strategy of improving children's language skills by providing English and Indonesian vocabulary with a vocabulary matching system as a basic understanding of language that is able to improve children's learning skills and enthusiasm due to the language environment in the Miracle Language Center institution, Thailand being an effective institution in supporting the ability to master foreign languages for children from an early age with a vulnerable 10-12 years.

# Keywords:

Skills, Children's Foreign Language, Miracle Language Center

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# Introduction

Education is a means of developing children's thinking skills in both physical and psychological forms, which are related to children's lives, including the family, school and community environments, which must be fostered in a conducive manner, to realize noble educational goals. (Rahmawati & Sholeh, 2021)(Mizani & Ramli, 2022); (Oktaviana et al., 2022). One of the abilities that need to be honed is mastery of foreign languages, foreign language skills are not many who master and like, this is important to develop so that the importance of mastering foreign languages is embedded, it is unfortunate that few know the importance of mastering languages. (Septiana et al., 2021). Foreign languages are a necessity in the era of disruption. Learning a foreign language will help in obtaining deeper information. (Yulitasari, 2019). Efforts to master languages start early, such as at the elementary school level (Devi Maharani Santika et al., 2021). The main challenge of teaching children to speak English is that there is a lack of vocabulary.(Dewi Kumala Sari, 2022). But in reality, learning English is difficult for both students and English teachers. English is usually perceived by students as a challenge to master (Nurfitriani et al., 2020). (Nurfitriani et al., 2021).. This is certainly not in line with the needs in the era of globalization where language skills are important in competing with other countries. (Saipul Iman, Magfhfirotul Fatha, 2021).. Chomsky also expressed the same thing, that only humans can master verbal language, he based it on his assumptions. First, language behavior is genetic, which has a broad development pattern and the environment only plays a small role in understanding a language. Second, people can master it in a relatively short time. Third, there is not enough information in the linguistic environment to support a complex adult grammar. In addition, according to Chomsky, every child is born will acquire language with the help of a device for acquiring language known as LAD (Language Acquisition Device).(Isna, 2019).

The ability to speak a foreign language can expand one's social network and provide greater prospects in life. (Marzuki, 2021). When someone has language skills, they have the opportunity to be globally competitive both in the world of work and other competitions. Various countries that have a background of not mastering foreign languages are starting to come out of the zone only focusing on regional languages, even educational institutions have thought about the importance of mastering foreign languages, one of which is at the elementary school level where language has been introduced to children from an early age, not only that, there are many non-formal institutions engaged in foreign language mastery training, namely at various levels of education. At the elementary school level, one of the basic teachings given is the provision of English vocabulary as a form of education to add insight into children's language mastery. Children teaching elementary school English are divided into two groups, one for younger children with an age range (6-8 years) and the other for older children with an age range (9-12 years).(Septiana et al., 2021).

Vocabulary mastery is the initial basis for mastering foreign languages, this ability is a problem in the learning process, namely students still have not mastered vocabulary. (Nanda et al., 2020). In addition, the integration of the times in learning also needs to be done as in the research conducted by (Permana et al., 2023) the use of Quizizz can encourage aspects of fun, motivation, involvement, and satisfaction and will achieve interactive learning. (Pratiwi & Toshiaki, 2023)This is a special concern for teachers in providing basic skills in mastering language, one of which is improving the learning system. (Friantary & Eliya, 2023).. Providing vocabulary to students in learning in order to support children's mastery of foreign languages. According to (Purandina, 2022);(Dalilah & Sya, 2022);(Agus Winarko, Setia Rini, 2023). Language skills are more appropriate to start early, especially during the crisis of language acquisition. According to many experts, learning a language at a young

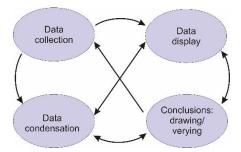
age is very important to develop language proficiency. (Isna, 2019);(Gabriel Fredi Daar, 2020). Furthermore, according to (Najib & Prastowo, 2023) utilizing YouTube videos as learning media with the Drill and Practice method to increase children's English vocabulary. Efforts in providing vocabulary include efforts to master foreign languages, as according to (Subekti, 2019) in (Auranissa Hernanda et al., 2020). (Auranissa Hernanda et al., 2022) English, including international languages, is increasingly important to master so that human resources are able to compete globally in the midst of advancing times. Meanwhile, according to (Zulfania Arrahma et al., 2022) Some ways that can be done to increase English skills are by concentrating on pursuing English, mentoring with friends, using English consistently in daily interactions, learning the language slowly, enrolling in English classes, listening to English music, and watching English movies. follow activities related to international forums and others. In addition, a good learning system is also needed, which has a structured learning direction so that the learning process achieves effectiveness. These things can overcome the idea that learning English is difficult. (Mohd, 2022)This is also the fundamental thing that makes someone hampered in learning, namely that they have been influenced at the beginning that they cannot, which results in lack of confidence in learning.

Based on research conducted by (Fajriyatur Robi'ah, 2023) This effort is made so that learning English can be interpreted as a milestone to compete in the international realm. The national language or Indonesian is indeed the main language that must be learned, but learning English does not mean the loss of a sense of nationalism in humans even on the contrary, learning English is a provision in facing a developing life and meeting the demands of the times and adding insight. (Yulitasari, 2019). Indonesian is the language of the state, national identity, and the hallmark of the Indonesian nation, the use of Indonesian has been listed in Presidential Regulation Number 63 of 2019. (Zulfania Arrahma et al., 2022).. According to research conducted by (Aprianto et al., 2021) the existence of a language development training program has not achieved learning effectiveness this is due to low knowledge of English, no additional learning resources and the amount of time allocated is very limited. In this study, it does not focus on providing English vocabulary, but also provides Indonesian vocabulary. The reason for providing Indonesian vocabulary in between English lessons is with the aim that children in Miracle Language Center can also master Indonesian. This is inversely proportional to previous research conducted by(Murny & Hamdani, 2022) The combination of giving English vocabulary into Indonesian will experience the decline of the existence of the national language, namely Indonesian. As for the current research, it utilizes the combination of English and Indonesian vocabulary as an increase in the insight of foreign language mastery at Miracle Language Center, Narathiwat, Thailand.

The purpose of this study is to determine the Foreign Language Skills of Elementary School Age Children. The object of this research at *Miracle Language Center*, the reason the researcher took the object was because it included a language institution that was right in Narathiwad, Thailand. From the observations of researchers, the ability of children in the age range of 10-12 years in mastering English is quite good. Based on the initial hypothesis, the existence of a language development institution will provide a good opportunity, especially children in developing themselves, especially in having foreign language skills, therefore the researcher is interested in raising the research title entitled "Foreign *Language* Skills of Elementary School-Age Children at *Miracle Language Center*".

#### **Research Methods**

The research method used is field research, namely a qualitative-descriptive research design with the aim of exploring and understanding the meaning given by individuals or groups in a problem (Sugiyono, 2018). The object of this research is Miracle Language Center, Narathiwat, Thailand, which is a language development institution at various levels of education. The research informants consisted of 1 teacher and 4 students (age range 11-12 years). Data collection techniques through observation, interviews and documentation. Interviews with teachers to obtain general implementation information and with students to obtain information on the extent of foreign language acquisition in *Miracle Language Center* educational institutions. *The* data analysis technique used is the (Miles et al., 2014)The data analysis technique used is the model of (Miles et al., 2014), exploring, reviewing data on the implementation of foreign language learning at the *Miracle Language Center* by concluding how the foreign language skills of school-age children. Data validity checks used by researchers are credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability.



Data Analysis Technique of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña Model

#### **Results and Discussion**

The research findings show that children who learn foreign languages need extra help, in this case the *Miracle Language Center* educational institution becomes a place to foster children's foreign language skills from an early age. The language acquisition skills at the Miracle Language Center also provide Indonesian language teaching with the aim of providing additional knowledge to students with strategies to improve children's language skills by providing English and Indonesian vocabulary with a vocabulary matching system as a basic understanding of language that can improve children's learning skills and enthusiasm because the language environment in the Miracle Language Center institution, Thailand is an effective institution in supporting foreign language acquisition skills for children from an early age with a vulnerable 10-12 years. The place is effectively used in creating a good language environment. This has similarities with research conducted by (Muhdi & Daelami, 2023) one of the factors that determine the success of foreign language development is the language environment. Interviews with teacher informants related to the general implementation of vocabulary provision at Miracle Language Center from children easily mastering English while in mastering Indonesian language difficulties only those with Malay backgrounds are able to master Indonesian, this is in line with the expression of children who are Malay enthusiastic in learning Indonesian. Interview with the second informant, namely with students regarding the existence of student interest in learning vocabulary and students become enthusiastic when learning is done by playing. The obstacle experienced in learning is the habit of children at home who use the native Thai language so that when learning English and Indonesian requires guidance that must be optimal so that children are able to master foreign languages like the native Thai language. Then, for other obstacles

because English is a second language, not the first language, not the mother tongue, and not native speakers Children are less able to apply in everyday life. This is in line with research conducted by (Asmara, 2020) Indonesian students at State Vocational Schools in Bogor Regency feel more effective in learning foreign languages when they combine local and foreign languages.

The vocabulary program is the initial basis in familiarizing students with foreign languages that have two language translation combinations, namely English and Indonesian. When this combination is done, of course, children will get used to learning both languages. Salat one series of random vocabulary learning and then students sort the vocabulary accordingly. Here are the results of the English and Indonesian vocabulary learning from the vocabulary matching.

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Figure 2. Vocabulary Learning Outcomes

# Strategies for Improving Children's Foreign Language Skills

Based on the results of the researcher's observation, the optimization of teaching has been implemented in a language development institution called Miracle Language Center. In this learning activity provides opportunities for children to learn, teachers use English and Indonesian vocabulary matching strategies as an effort to improve children's basic language skills. From the results of interviews, this good activity can certainly succeed and run effectively depending on three elements, namely the government, teachers and parents. The role of the government in helping to advance language development institutions by contributing adequate educational facilities, the role of teachers is to provide optimal teaching so as to achieve learning objectives. The role of the parents themselves is in terms of support both in terms of material and follow-up learning when at home.

Language is a communication tool used by individuals to interact with other people (Saud et al., 2023). Language is used as a medium of information, knowledge or ideas (Juliati et al., 2020). As the conditions in the field found by researchers, children are still very enthusiastic in participating in foreign language learning. Some experts argue that the capacity to speak a language is innate and present at birth, while some argue that internal and external factors influence language proficiency. (Isna, 2019). Foreign language skills are needed especially in daily activities, for example, conversing with foreigners who speak English in tourist attractions and

education. (Auranissa Hernanda et al., 2022);(Jendra et al., 2023). In the world community, English is an important language that serves as a medium of international communication. (Az Zahra & Sya, 2022). However, there is still a lack of knowledge of English such as vocabulary (Zahra et al., 2023). English is widely used in technology, education, politics, trade, and other fields. (Agus Winarko, Setia Rini, 2023).. As for ordinary communication, language and human interaction cannot be avoided. Language is considered as a tool or method to express oneself during conversation. In ordinary communication, the common language can also change. People are familiar with the words "mother tongue" and "foreign language," which are other names for "second language." Before learning another language, a person learns, uses, and masters their mother tongue, often known as their first language. The order in which a person learns languages often correlates with their mother tongue, which is usually the language learned before the age of three. (Septiana et al., 2021). According to Ratminingsih in research conducted by (Putri & Sya, 2022) teaching English from the beginning is based on the pedagogical principle that language acquisition occurs more quickly and efficiently the earlier a child is introduced to a foreign language, the faster and better the child will acquire the language.

# Implementation of Children's Foreign Language Skills Activities at Miracle Language Center

Children's foreign language skills learning activities are carried out in the age range of 10-12 years old which are carried out every Monday - Friday at 09.15-10.15 WIB with a total of 4 students who are very enthusiastic in participating in language learning, namely vocabulary sharing with the translation grammar method. The implementation of activities is carried out in three stages as follows: Initial Preparation: In this preparation step, I analyzed the characteristics of the children and prepared teaching materials that would be applied in the learning process. Implementation: In this implementation step, vocabulary learning took place every day from 09.15-10.15 WIB. Evaluation: The final stage of this activity involves evaluation with the aim of producing better learning in the next meeting and becoming a reference to determine the ability of students at Miracle Language Center (MLC). The preparation needs for this learning activity are prepared by MLC itself as an educational institution. They provide facilities such as teaching places, whiteboards, study tables, and other necessary equipment.

Vocabulary is taught every day, focusing on English and Indonesian vocabulary. In the vocabulary learning process, students learn to memorize the given vocabulary. The teacher or the team dictates the vocabulary and its meaning and the students write it down in their notebooks. After the notes are finished, the teacher clearly pronounces the words one by one, ensuring proper intonation. The aim is for students to check their notes and correct any errors in pronunciation.

In the vocabulary memorization process, students are given 2-3 minutes to memorize the vocabulary and its meaning. After that, the teacher tests their memorization by randomly asking them the vocabulary that has been taught. This process is done back and forth until the students are able to answer all the vocabulary correctly. This approach aims to make learning more effective and interesting, so that students do not feel bored or saturated. (Sholeh et al., 2021).



Vocabulary Sharing Learning Process at Miracle Language Center

As for during the activity, there is an evaluation of the implementation of the activity, namely: The material that has been taught in the previous meeting is repeated when new material is presented, with the aim of connecting interconnected concepts and strengthening children's mastery of foreign languages. If students are absent from the activity, they are expected to provide reasons for absence to the teacher as a form of discipline and responsibility. When implementing activities, practical and efficient learning strategies and methods are needed, so that students can easily understand foreign language materials. The goal is to make foreign language learning more interesting and fun for students. After completing the lesson, the implementer needs to conduct an evaluation session through questions and answers about the material that has been taught. This aims to strengthen students' understanding of the foreign language. In learning vocabulary material, the successful achievement is that students are able to memorize more than ten vocabulary words given. The charades method helps students concentrate on memorization.

Based on the results of interviews with teachers in terms of learning that is applied is still very monotonous so that students tend to be less enthusiastic in learning. The strategy used is to provide English vocabulary as well as Indonesian translation with the aim that students also understand foreign languages, namely English and Indonesian, where students match vocabulary that has been randomized, besides that to make students' attractiveness increase, it is also assisted by media in the form of *text cards*. This activity is supported by the establishment of a child language development institution called *Miracle Language Center*. This institution focuses on teaching children's language. Therefore, children who are members get a good opportunity to improve their language skills. As according to research (Annisa et al., 2022) mastering the correct pronunciation of language starts from the correct mention of vocabulary, so it is very important to master language in a fundamental way first, namely mastery of vocabulary.

### Conclusion

Children who learn foreign languages need extra help, in this case the *Miracle Language Center* educational institution becomes a place to foster children's foreign language skills from an early age. The language acquisition skills at the *Miracle Language Center* also provide Indonesian language teaching with the aim of providing additional knowledge to students with a strategy to improve children's language skills by providing English and Indonesian vocabulary with a vocabulary matching system as a basic understanding of language that can improve children's learning skills and enthusiasm because the language environment in the *Miracle Language Center* institution, Thailand is an effective institution in supporting foreign language acquisition skills for children from an early age with a vulnerable 10-12 years. The place is effectively used in creating a good language environment.

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