

Integrating Basic Listening with Cross-Cultural Understanding in Early Childhood Education Curriculum

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*Article received: 09 Mei 2024, Review process: 20 Mei 2024,
Article Accepted: 25 Juni 2024, Article published: 01 Juli 2024*

ABSTRACT

Early childhood education serves as the cornerstone for developing language skills and socio-cultural competencies in the global era. This study aims to examine the integration of basic listening skills with cross-cultural understanding in early childhood education curricula. A qualitative descriptive design was employed, utilizing classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with early childhood teachers, and curriculum document analysis, with thematic coding and triangulation applied for data validation. The findings reveal that listening activities through stories, songs, and play not only enhanced children's phonological awareness and language comprehension but also fostered empathy, tolerance, and cultural sensitivity. These results affirm that merging listening skills with cross-cultural understanding offers an innovative framework for early childhood curricula, with implications for cultivating communicative, inclusive, and globally competent future generations.

Keywords: *Arly Childhood Education, Listening Skills, Cross-Cultural Understanding*

ABSTRAK

Pendidikan anak usia dini merupakan fondasi penting bagi pembentukan keterampilan bahasa dan kompetensi sosial-kultural di era global. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis integrasi keterampilan dasar menyimak dengan pemahaman lintas budaya dalam kurikulum PAUD. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif-deskriptif melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan guru PAUD, serta analisis dokumen kurikulum, dengan data dianalisis secara tematik dan diuji keabsahannya melalui triangulasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kegiatan menyimak berbasis cerita, lagu, dan permainan tidak hanya meningkatkan kesadaran fonologis dan pemahaman bahasa anak, tetapi juga menumbuhkan empati, toleransi, dan kepekaan budaya. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa penyatuan keterampilan menyimak dengan pemahaman lintas budaya dapat menjadi kerangka inovatif bagi kurikulum PAUD, sehingga berimplikasi pada lahirnya generasi yang komunikatif, inklusif, dan siap menghadapi keragaman global.

Kata Kunci: PAUD, Keterampilan Menyimak, Pemahaman Lintas Budaya

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education serves as the foundation for lifelong learning, shaping not only cognitive development but also social, emotional, and cultural competencies. In today's interconnected world, children are increasingly exposed to diverse languages, values, and traditions from an early age. Scholars emphasize that the formative years are critical for developing essential communication skills and cultural sensitivity, which enable children to adapt in multicultural environments (UNESCO, 2021; Pinter, 2017). Thus, early education must move beyond rote knowledge transfer and provide meaningful learning experiences that integrate basic listening with cross-cultural understanding.

Listening is one of the core skills that underpins language acquisition and communication. Research indicates that listening constitutes approximately 45% of daily communication, underscoring its central role in learning and interaction (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). For young learners, basic listening lays the groundwork for speaking, reading, and writing, as it involves decoding sounds, recognizing patterns, and constructing meaning from auditory input (Field, 2008). In early childhood settings, listening instruction is often overlooked compared to other language domains, which results in limited opportunities for children to strengthen their receptive skills. Incorporating structured listening activities into the curriculum provides a strong basis for holistic language development.

In parallel, the ability to understand and respect cultural differences is increasingly acknowledged as an essential 21st-century skill. Cross-cultural understanding enables children to navigate diversity, appreciate other perspectives, and build empathy, which are crucial for fostering peaceful coexistence in plural societies (Banks, 2016; Dervin, 2016). Within early childhood education, cultivating intercultural awareness does not mean teaching complex theories of cultural studies, but rather nurturing sensitivity through stories, songs, play, and social interaction. Studies highlight that children exposed to multicultural activities early are more likely to develop tolerance and global-mindedness in later stages of life (Byram, 2021; Deardorff, 2020).

Integrating basic listening with cross-cultural understanding provides a unique pedagogical approach that aligns with the holistic vision of early childhood education. Listening activities embedded with cultural content, such as traditional folktales, diverse music, and multilingual dialogues, allow children to simultaneously enhance their linguistic competencies and cultural awareness (Chen, 2019). Furthermore, this integration reflects the constructivist perspective, which posits that children actively construct knowledge by connecting linguistic input with social and cultural contexts (Vygotsky, 1978; Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). By fostering both listening and cultural learning, educators can prepare children to become effective communicators and empathetic global citizens.

From a curriculum development perspective, this integration requires intentional planning that balances language instruction with cultural exposure. Research in early childhood curriculum design suggests that thematic and play-based approaches are highly effective in embedding abstract concepts like cultural

diversity into tangible experiences for children (Noddings, 2013; Edwards, 2017). For instance, teachers can design listening activities around multicultural stories that promote values of respect and cooperation, while simultaneously building phonological awareness and comprehension skills. This approach not only supports language proficiency but also cultivates inclusivity in the classroom environment.

Given these considerations, the present study aims to examine how integrating basic listening with cross-cultural understanding can be effectively implemented in early childhood education curricula. Specifically, the research seeks to explore pedagogical strategies, curriculum models, and practical classroom applications that foster both listening competence and intercultural sensitivity among young learners. Through this exploration, the study contributes to the growing discourse on holistic early childhood education that prepares children to thrive in linguistically and culturally diverse societies.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the integration of basic listening and cross-cultural understanding in early childhood education curricula. The qualitative design was chosen to capture the depth of pedagogical practices, cultural contexts, and classroom dynamics that cannot be adequately represented through quantitative measures. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with early childhood educators, and document analysis of curriculum plans. The participants consisted of teachers from early childhood education institutions representing diverse cultural backgrounds, selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance and richness of information. Data collection emphasized naturalistic settings to preserve the authenticity of interactions between teachers and children during listening and cultural learning activities.

The data analysis process followed thematic analysis, where transcripts, field notes, and curriculum documents were systematically coded and categorized to identify patterns related to listening instruction and intercultural integration. Triangulation was employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings by comparing data from different sources and methods. Researcher reflexivity was maintained throughout the study to minimize bias and ensure that interpretations reflected the perspectives of the participants. Ethical considerations were observed by obtaining informed consent from teachers, maintaining confidentiality, and ensuring that children's identities were protected. The methodological framework was designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how early childhood educators integrate basic listening with cross-cultural understanding in practice, thereby aligning with the study's objective of contributing to curriculum development in early childhood education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Development of Basic Listening Competence in Early Childhood

The findings revealed that listening is not merely a passive reception of sounds but an active process through which children interpret, understand, and internalize meaning. Teachers emphasized that listening activities, such as storytelling, songs, and guided conversations, significantly improved children's attention span and comprehension. These results resonate with the assertion of Field (2008) that listening plays a central role in scaffolding other linguistic skills, including speaking and reading. The development of listening in early childhood is thus a prerequisite for comprehensive language growth.

Observations indicated that children who were consistently engaged in structured listening tasks demonstrated stronger phonological awareness and vocabulary acquisition. Teachers noted that children were able to identify sound patterns, intonation, and word boundaries more effectively compared to those who had limited exposure. This aligns with Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), who found that listening comprehension directly influences learners' ability to engage in higher-level communicative exchanges.

The study further showed that listening activities had to be adapted to the developmental level of children. Teachers often used short, repetitive instructions and multimodal cues such as gestures and visuals to support understanding. This reflects the constructivist perspective of Vygotsky (1978), who highlighted the role of scaffolding in children's learning. By simplifying language and contextualizing instructions, teachers allowed children to build their listening skills progressively.

A notable outcome was the increase in children's participation during group discussions after being exposed to focused listening sessions. For example, when teachers read multicultural folktales, children were able to recall details, predict outcomes, and share their reflections. This indicates that listening is closely tied to memory, critical thinking, and expressive language development (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021).

The effectiveness of listening instruction was also linked to the use of authentic materials. Teachers who incorporated real-life sounds, music, and dialogues from different cultures observed greater enthusiasm and engagement from the children. Authentic listening input not only enhanced comprehension but also promoted cultural awareness, as reported by Chen (2019).

Interestingly, the study revealed gender-based and personality-related differences in listening behavior. Some teachers observed that boys tended to be more restless during extended listening tasks, while girls exhibited higher patience and focus. However, this was not absolute and depended on classroom management and the teacher's ability to create interactive listening environments. Such variations underscore the importance of differentiated instruction in early childhood classrooms (Edwards, 2017).

Children's listening competence was also influenced by parental involvement. Teachers highlighted that children who practiced listening at home through bedtime stories or family conversations showed faster progress in class.

This supports research by Pinter (2017), who noted that home literacy practices strongly complement formal instruction.

Moreover, the study found that the integration of listening tasks into play-based learning contexts produced better outcomes. When listening was embedded in games, role-play, or musical activities, children showed higher levels of enjoyment and retention. This reinforces Noddings' (2013) argument that joyful learning environments are essential in early education.

Teachers also recognized challenges in sustaining children's attention, especially in larger classrooms with limited resources. Noise distractions and varying language abilities among students sometimes hindered the effectiveness of listening activities. To overcome this, teachers employed strategies such as small-group instruction and multisensory aids. These strategies were effective in sustaining focus and improving comprehension.

Overall, the findings confirmed that basic listening skills are foundational to early childhood learning and can be effectively cultivated through intentional and interactive classroom strategies. Such development is essential not only for linguistic growth but also for broader educational success in later years.

Integration of Cross-Cultural Understanding in Early Childhood Curriculum

The study revealed that cross-cultural understanding was most effectively taught when integrated into everyday classroom activities rather than treated as a separate subject. Teachers utilized storytelling, songs, and cultural artifacts to introduce children to different traditions and values. This approach reflects Banks' (2016) framework of multicultural education, which advocates embedding diversity into the curriculum.

Observations showed that children were highly receptive to cultural content when presented in a playful and engaging manner. For instance, listening to folktales from different countries encouraged curiosity and empathy toward diverse communities. Such findings are consistent with Dervin (2016), who emphasizes that intercultural education should focus on fostering positive attitudes rather than abstract concepts.

Teachers also highlighted the importance of language exposure in promoting cross-cultural understanding. By introducing simple phrases from various languages during listening activities, children developed both linguistic curiosity and respect for diversity. This resonates with Byram (2021), who argued that intercultural communicative competence begins with exposure to multiple linguistic codes.

The findings revealed that cultural learning also supported social-emotional development. Children who engaged in intercultural activities demonstrated higher levels of empathy, cooperation, and problem-solving skills. This supports Deardorff's (2020) assertion that intercultural competence is not merely cognitive but also deeply relational.

Cross-cultural integration was further reinforced through parental involvement. Teachers encouraged families to share cultural practices, songs, and

foods during classroom events. This practice enhanced authenticity and gave children opportunities to directly interact with cultural diversity. It also mirrored UNESCO's (2021) call for community-based approaches to early childhood education.

One challenge identified was the limited availability of multicultural resources, particularly in rural schools. Teachers often relied on digital media or locally adapted materials to compensate. While this posed difficulties, it also encouraged creativity and innovation in lesson design. Such resourcefulness aligns with global recommendations for flexible curriculum adaptation in early education (Knight, 2014).

The findings also showed that children developed early critical awareness of cultural differences. For example, during class discussions, children noted similarities and differences between their own traditions and those in the stories. This observation supports Sahin (2018), who argued that early exposure fosters reflective and inclusive attitudes.

Importantly, integrating cultural understanding was found to strengthen classroom harmony. Teachers reported fewer conflicts and more collaborative behavior when cultural lessons were consistently embedded in the curriculum. This suggests that intercultural learning contributes not only to academic outcomes but also to social cohesion.

Teachers also observed that cultural content increased children's motivation for listening tasks. The novelty of unfamiliar stories, music, or traditions created a sense of excitement that enhanced attention and comprehension. This finding is consistent with Mok (2016), who highlighted that cultural relevance enhances learning engagement.

Overall, the integration of cross-cultural understanding was found to be both feasible and impactful when tied to daily listening practices, community participation, and authentic cultural content. Such integration not only enriched children's cognitive skills but also cultivated empathy and inclusivity from an early age.

Pedagogical Implications and Curriculum Innovation

The results underscored the need for intentional curriculum design that integrates basic listening with cross-cultural understanding. Teachers emphasized that these two domains should not be seen as separate but complementary, as listening serves as the gateway to intercultural awareness. This echoes the work of Goh and Vandergrift (2021), who stress that metacognitive listening strategies can be linked to cultural content to enhance both language and intercultural competence.

One implication for pedagogy is the importance of play-based and thematic approaches. Integrating listening with multicultural themes allowed teachers to address multiple developmental areas simultaneously. For example, listening to cultural songs not only improved auditory discrimination but also introduced

children to global traditions. This approach reflects Edwards' (2017) assertion that thematic integration enhances holistic learning.

The study also highlighted the role of teacher training in implementing such integration. Teachers expressed the need for professional development that equips them with strategies for combining listening instruction and cultural content effectively. This aligns with Knight (2014), who stresses that teacher readiness is critical for curriculum innovation.

Another implication is the necessity of parental and community involvement. The study showed that when families contributed cultural knowledge and practices, children were more engaged and the learning process became more authentic. This finding reinforces the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2018).

Curriculum innovation also requires adequate resources and policy support. Teachers pointed out that limited access to multicultural materials sometimes constrained lesson implementation. Policymakers should therefore provide resource banks and encourage the production of culturally inclusive educational content. Such support aligns with UNESCO's (2021) call for equitable and inclusive education.

In terms of classroom practice, teachers noted that integrating listening with cultural activities enhanced differentiation. For instance, students with varying levels of listening skills could still engage meaningfully with cultural stories through visual supports and group work. This finding corresponds with Noddings' (2013) emphasis on inclusive and flexible pedagogy.

The integration also had implications for children's identity development. Exposure to multiple cultural perspectives helped children affirm their own cultural identities while respecting others. This dual process reflects Cummins' (2000) theory of identity affirmation in multilingual and multicultural contexts.

Teachers also suggested that integrating listening and cross-cultural understanding fostered long-term global competencies. Children not only improved their immediate listening skills but also developed habits of empathy, tolerance, and reflective thinking that will serve them in later education. This confirms Byram's (2021) view that intercultural competence is developmental and cumulative.

The study further implied that evaluation methods in early childhood should include both listening and intercultural dimensions. Traditional assessments focused solely on cognitive outcomes may overlook the affective and social skills gained through integrated learning. This supports the argument of Deardorff (2020) for holistic assessment of intercultural competence.

In conclusion, the pedagogical implications point to the need for curriculum innovation that merges basic listening with cross-cultural understanding as a unified framework. Such integration not only enhances language acquisition but also nurtures intercultural competence, empathy, and inclusivity in early childhood education.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrated that integrating basic listening with cross-cultural understanding in early childhood education provides a comprehensive approach to nurturing both linguistic and socio-cultural competencies. Listening activities, when designed intentionally through storytelling, songs, and play-based strategies, significantly enhanced children's phonological awareness, comprehension, and participation in communicative exchanges. At the same time, embedding cultural content within these activities fostered empathy, tolerance, and inclusivity, enabling children to develop intercultural sensitivity at an early age. This integration confirmed that listening is not only a cognitive process but also a gateway to broader social learning that prepares children for life in multicultural societies.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings highlight the need for curriculum innovation, teacher training, and community involvement to support effective implementation. Teachers require resources and professional development to design lessons that link listening practices with authentic cultural experiences, while families and communities play a vital role in reinforcing intercultural values outside the classroom. Ultimately, this study affirms that a curriculum which unites basic listening and cross-cultural understanding equips children with foundational communication skills and global awareness, aligning early childhood education with the broader goal of fostering empathetic, reflective, and competent future generations.

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