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Stimulating Early Childhood Language Development in Implementing Deep Learning in Kindergarten

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Abstract
Language development is a fundamental aspect of early childhood development because it supports children's ability to communicate, participate socially, regulate experiences, and construct knowledge. The implementation of deep learning in kindergarten provides an opportunity to strengthen language stimulation through learning experiences that are mindful, meaningful, and joyful rather than through repetitive language drills. This article aims to formulate a conceptual framework for language stimulation in kindergarten within the deep learning approach. The article uses a narrative literature review by synthesizing recent international research on teacher-child interaction, shared and dialogic book reading, playful learning, and home-school language continuity, together with the Indonesian policy framework for deep learning. The synthesis indicates that language stimulation can be integrated into everyday classroom experiences through responsive conversation, open-ended questioning, story retelling, role play, thematic block play, picture-book exploration, singing and rhythmic language activities, collaborative projects, and reflection. The three principles of deep learning can be operationalized as: mindful language interaction by helping children attend, listen, and express ideas; meaningful language interaction by connecting vocabulary and narratives to children's real experiences; and joyful language interaction by creating safe, playful, and emotionally supportive opportunities to communicate. Assessment should emphasize authentic observation of children's listening, vocabulary, expressive language, narrative ability, turn-taking, and confidence in communication. The article proposes practical stages for teachers to plan, implement, document, and reflect on language stimulation without turning kindergarten into formal language instruction.

Keywords: early childhood education; language development; deep learning; teacher child interaction

1. Intoduction

Language is not only a communication skill but also a medium through which young children participate in social relationships, represent experiences, ask questions, negotiate meanings, and construct new knowledge. In kindergarten, language development therefore needs to be stimulated across the whole learning environment rather than isolated in worksheets or decontextualized vocabulary exercises. Research on early childhood classrooms indicates that the quality of teacher-child interaction is associated with children's language growth, particularly when teachers provide instructional support, organize engaging interactions, and create opportunities for extended talk [2].

Recent Indonesian education policy has strengthened the use of Pembelajaran Mendalam (deep learning) as an approach that emphasizes learning that is mindful, meaningful, and joyful. The official academic framework describes deep learning as an approach that respects learners by creating learning processes that are conscious, meaningful, and enjoyable, supported by pedagogical practice, learning environment, learning partnerships, and appropriate use of digital technology [1]. In 2026, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education also reported examples of deep learning implementation in kindergarten in which children are encouraged to observe, ask questions, explore, and collaborate [3].

The relevance of deep learning to language stimulation is strong because language develops through participation in meaningful interactions. Children need repeated opportunities to hear rich language, interpret meaning, formulate responses, tell stories, ask questions, negotiate with peers, and receive responsive feedback. Evidence from kindergarten research shows that teacher language-support strategies can contribute to children's progress in sentence comprehension, morphological knowledge, and sentence memory [4]. Similarly, theme-based block play has been shown to facilitate preschool children's language development, demonstrating that language stimulation can emerge naturally from playful, contextual activities [5].

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However, implementation may become superficial if the term deep learning is interpreted simply as difficult activities, long projects, or the use of sophisticated technology. For young children, depth should be understood in relation to the quality of experience: children are attentive to what they are doing, understand its relevance, actively use language to make meaning, and have opportunities to revisit and reflect on their experiences. This article therefore focuses on how kindergarten teachers can translate the principles of deep learning into concrete language stimulation practices.

The purpose of this article is to develop a conceptual and practical framework for stimulating early childhood language development through deep learning in kindergarten. The discussion integrates evidence on teacher-child interaction, playful learning, dialogic/shared book reading, home-school continuity, and the principles of deep learning. The resulting framework is intended to support teachers in designing language-rich learning experiences that remain developmentally appropriate, contextual, and enjoyable.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Language Development in Early Childhood

Language development in early childhood includes receptive language (understanding words, sentences, and meanings), expressive language (using words and sentences to communicate), vocabulary, grammar, narrative ability, pragmatic communication, and emergent literacy. These components develop dynamically through interaction with adults, peers, materials, and cultural contexts. The classroom is therefore not merely a place where children receive language input; it is a social space in which children use language for authentic purposes.

Evidence from a longitudinal preschool study found that classroom organization and instructional support were positive predictors of later receptive vocabulary development. Teachers who ask open questions, model richer language, provide feedback, and maintain productive learning routines create conditions that support children's vocabulary growth [2]. This finding suggests that the teacher's interactional role is central to language stimulation.

Language development also benefits from structured support embedded in everyday activities. A teacher-focused intervention in German kindergartens trained educators to use language-support strategies during ordinary conversations; children in the intervention condition showed faster progress in several language-related outcomes [4]. The implication for kindergarten is that language stimulation does not require a separate 'language lesson' every day. Instead, language-support strategies can be woven into arrival routines, play, exploration, storytelling, meals, outdoor activities, and closing reflection.

2.2. Playful Learning as a Context for Language Stimulation

Play creates a natural context for children to communicate because play contains roles, problems, materials, rules, negotiation, and shared attention. In thematic block play, for example, children may name objects, describe spatial relationships, plan constructions, explain ideas, negotiate roles, and retell events. A quasi-experimental study with Chinese preschoolers found that a theme-based block-play intervention facilitated language development [5].

From a deep learning perspective, play becomes especially valuable when the teacher does not take over the activity but enriches it through carefully timed prompts. Questions such as 'What are you building?', 'Why did you choose that?', 'What might happen if...?', and 'Can you tell your friend how to do it?' encourage children to explain, predict, sequence, and justify. The goal is not to demand adult-like answers, but to expand the child's opportunity to use language for thinking and social participation.

2.3. Shared and Dialogic Book Reading

Shared book reading offers another powerful context for language stimulation. Rather than reading a story from beginning to end while children listen passively, teachers can use dialogic strategies: invite predictions, ask children to label and describe illustrations, connect events with their experiences, encourage retelling, and extend children's utterances. A systematic review reported promising effects of dialogic reading on lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic indicators among children with language difficulties, while also noting limitations in intervention design and measurement [6].

Research on picture-book reading in preschool settings also indicates that book-reading interventions can support language and related cognitive outcomes, although findings across studies are not uniformly positive [7]. This suggests that the quality of interaction matters. A book is not automatically a language intervention; its potential is realized when children actively participate in shared attention and meaning-making.

2.4. Deep Learning in Kindergarten

In the Indonesian policy framework, deep learning is organized around three principles: mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning. The framework also describes learning experiences through understanding, applying, and reflecting, supported by

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pedagogical practice, the learning environment, learning partnerships, and digital technology [1]. For kindergarten, these principles need to be translated developmentally rather than mechanically.

Mindful learning can mean helping children focus their attention, listen to others, recognize what they are doing, and become aware of their own ideas and feelings. Meaningful learning can mean connecting new words, stories, and concepts to children's families, local environments, play experiences, and everyday problems. Joyful learning can mean creating an emotionally safe environment in which children are willing to speak, make mistakes, laugh, move, imagine, and communicate without fear of being judged.

Deep learning should therefore not be equated with academic acceleration. In kindergarten, depth can emerge from repeated, purposeful, and increasingly complex conversations around experiences that matter to children.

3. Methodology

This article uses a narrative literature review approach. The review synthesizes two groups of sources: (1) recent international peer-reviewed studies concerning early language development, teacher-child interaction, playful learning, shared/dialogic book reading, and home-school language practices; and (2) primary Indonesian policy documents concerning the implementation of deep learning in education, particularly at the early childhood level. The international literature was prioritized from 2021–2026 to maintain contemporary relevance.

Sources were examined thematically rather than statistically. The analysis focused on four questions: (a) what interactional practices support language development in kindergarten; (b) how play and shared reading create language-rich contexts; (c) how the principles of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning can be translated into language stimulation; and (d) how teachers can assess language development authentically. The synthesis was then organized into a practical framework for kindergarten learning.

Because this article is a conceptual review, the examples of classroom activities are proposed applications derived from the literature and policy framework; they are not reported as empirical findings from a new classroom experiment.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. A Framework for Language Stimulation through Deep Learning

The literature synthesis suggests that language stimulation in deep learning can be organized around the interaction between the three principles of deep learning and core language practices. Table 1 presents the proposed framework.

Principle	Language focus	Teacher practice	Example in TK
Mmindful	Listening, attention, turn-taking, expressing feelings	Use calm prompts; give wait time; model attentive listening; invite children to notice words, sounds, and feelings.	Circle time: children listen to a short sound/story, identify what they heard, then share one response.
Meaningful	Vocabulary, narrative, explanation, connecting ideas	Connect new words to real objects, children's experiences, local culture, and classroom problems; ask open-ended questions.	Project 'Pasar di Sekitarku': children name goods, role-play buying/selling, describe quantities and retell experiences.
Joyful	Spontaneous speech, creativity, pragmatic language	Use songs, puppets, role play, movement, humor, choice, and collaborative play; avoid correcting every utterance directly.	Puppet story: children choose characters, improvise dialogue, and create an alternative ending.

Table 1. Proposed framework for language stimulation through deep learning.

4.2. Responsive Teacher-Child Interaction

Teacher responsiveness is the central mechanism connecting deep learning with language development. A responsive teacher listens to children's utterances, interprets the intention behind them, and extends the interaction instead of immediately replacing the child's speech with a 'correct' answer. For example, when a child says, 'The truck is broken,' the teacher may respond, 'Yes, the truck cannot move. What do you think happened?' The response adds vocabulary and invites explanation while maintaining the child's ownership of the conversation.

Open-ended questions are particularly useful because they allow multiple possible answers and encourage children to explain their thinking. However, open questions should be balanced with comments, modeling, repetition, and genuine listening.

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Excessive questioning can make conversation feel like an interrogation. Deep language learning is more likely when teacher talk and child talk form a reciprocal exchange.

4.3. Language-Rich Play and Project Experiences

Projects and thematic play can integrate language with science, mathematics, social development, art, and motor activity. Consider a theme such as 'My Neighborhood'. Children can observe photographs or take a short walk around the school, name places and people, ask questions, draw a simple map, role-play a shop or clinic, and tell the class what they discovered. The teacher can introduce vocabulary such as 'jalan', 'persimpangan', 'toko', 'penjual', 'pembeli', 'antrian', and 'petunjuk', then invite children to use the words in authentic situations.

This kind of experience reflects deep learning because children are not merely memorizing vocabulary. They encounter words in context, use them to solve communicative problems, apply them during play, and revisit them during reflection. The depth is visible in the increasing ability of children to connect words, actions, experiences, and meanings.

4.4. Storytelling, Dialogic Reading, and Narrative Development

Storytelling can be designed as a cycle of anticipation, interaction, retelling, and reflection. Before reading, the teacher can invite children to examine the cover and predict what may happen. During reading, the teacher pauses at key moments and asks children to describe emotions, explain causes, or predict consequences. After reading, children can sequence picture cards, retell the story in their own words, dramatize a scene, or create a different ending.

These practices support narrative language because children move from naming isolated objects toward connecting events. A child who says 'rabbit' can be encouraged to say 'The rabbit is running.' Later, the teacher may ask, 'Why is the rabbit running?' and support the child in constructing a causal statement. The process should remain playful and responsive rather than become a formal grammar exercise.

Shared reading can also be extended into family partnerships. Research on home-school language continuity emphasizes the importance of understanding children's linguistic and cultural environments [8]. Teachers can invite families to share local stories, songs, home-language words, or family experiences. Such practices can strengthen continuity between children's identities at home and their participation at school.

4.5. Digital Technology as a Supporting Tool

Digital technology can support language stimulation when it serves interaction rather than replacing it. For example, a teacher may use a short audio recording of environmental sounds as a stimulus for children to identify, imitate, compare, and describe sounds. A digital picture book can be used for shared discussion, followed by an offline activity in which children dramatize the story. Evidence from screen-mediated shared reading suggests that children can learn novel words in digital contexts, but engagement and learning conditions differ from in-person shared reading [9].

Therefore, the key question is not whether technology is present, but what children and teachers do with it. Technology is more consistent with deep learning when it becomes a stimulus for observing, talking, creating, collaborating, and reflecting. Passive screen viewing without interaction provides fewer opportunities for the reciprocal language exchanges that are central to early language development.

4.6. Authentic Assessment of Language Development

Language assessment in kindergarten should be integrated into daily experiences. Teachers can document children's language through anecdotal records, observation checklists, portfolios, audio or video documentation where permitted, children's drawings accompanied by explanations, story retelling, and samples of peer interaction. The emphasis should be on progress and the functional use of language rather than on a single test score.

Useful indicators include: (1) willingness to initiate communication; (2) ability to listen and take turns; (3) growth in vocabulary; (4) ability to combine words into increasingly meaningful utterances; (5) ability to describe, explain, predict, and retell; (6) ability to use language for social negotiation; and (7) confidence in communicating ideas and feelings. Teachers can compare observations over time and use the evidence to plan the next interaction or activity.

Assessment should also be sensitive to multilingual and culturally diverse children. A child's use of a home language should not automatically be interpreted as a deficit. Instead, teachers can recognize the child's linguistic resources and provide bridges between home language experiences and classroom communication [8].

4.7. Practical Learning Scenario in TK

The following scenario illustrates how one learning experience can integrate language stimulation with the three principles of deep learning.

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a. Theme: 'Mini Market in My Class'. Children observe pictures or real objects commonly found in a market and discuss what they know.
b. Be aware: the teacher begins with a brief attention routine, invites children to listen to a market sound, and asks them to identify what they notice.
c. Meaningful: children connect the activity to their experiences of going to a market with family. They introduce objects, classify them, create price labels, and use role-play language such as greeting, requesting, asking price, and thanking.
d. Exciting: children freely choose roles as sellers, buyers, or helpers. The teacher uses puppets, songs, movement, and humorous situations to encourage spontaneous communication.
e. Understanding: children learn and use vocabulary related to people, objects, actions, quantity, and place.
f. Applying: children use the vocabulary in role play and collaborative problem solving, for example when an item is missing or two children want the same role.
g. Reflecting: at the end, children share what they did, which words they remember, what they enjoyed, and what they would change in the next market play.

This scenario illustrates that language development is not an additional component placed on top of deep learning. Language is one of the main means through which children understand, apply, collaborate, and reflect. The teacher's role is to design an environment in which meaningful language use is necessary, possible, and enjoyable.

4.8. Challenges and Teacher Considerations

Several challenges should be anticipated. First, class size and limited time may reduce opportunities for individual conversation. Teachers can respond by using small-group activities, peer interaction, rotating roles, and brief one-to-one exchanges during play. Second, teachers may dominate classroom talk. Recording or reflecting on one's own teacher talk can help identify whether children have sufficient opportunities to speak.

Third, teachers may interpret deep learning as complicated projects. In kindergarten, a simple activity can become deep when children are invited to observe carefully, connect experiences, use language purposefully, and revisit what they learned. Fourth, language differences among children require flexible support. Teachers should avoid treating one linguistic pattern as the only acceptable form of participation and should value children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Finally, technology should remain subordinate to interaction. Digital tools are useful when they expand children's opportunities to explore and communicate, but they should not displace play, physical exploration, face-to-face conversation, or teacher responsiveness.

5. Conclusion

Stimulating language development in kindergarten is highly compatible with the principles of deep learning when language is developed through meaningful participation rather than isolated drills. The literature indicates that high-quality teacher-child interaction, playful learning, shared/dialogic book reading, and continuity between home and school provide important contexts for language development [2], [4]–[8].

The three principles of deep learning can be operationalized in language stimulation as follows: berkesadaran through attentive listening, turn-taking, and awareness of children's own communication; bermakna through vocabulary, storytelling, and conversation connected to real experiences; and menggembirakan through play, role play, songs, stories, movement, and emotionally safe interaction. Learning experiences can be organized through the sequence of understanding, applying, and reflecting, while assessment can rely on authentic observation and documentation.

For kindergarten teachers, the practical implication is to design fewer activities that are richer in interaction. A simple block-play activity, picture book, neighborhood walk, puppet story, or market role play can become a deep language-learning experience when children are given space to talk, think, ask, explain, negotiate, and reflect. Future empirical studies can test the proposed framework across different kindergarten contexts and examine changes in vocabulary, narrative ability, pragmatic language, and children's participation.

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