

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter discusses TEYL, vocabulary development, and the use of technology in teaching English vocabulary. It also explains the characteristics of young learners and EYL teachers, appropriate materials and media, and how to integrate Gather.Town into vocabulary instruction.

2.1 Teaching English to Young Learners

English was first introduced as a local content subject in Indonesian elementary schools starting from the fourth grade in 1993, reflecting its growing popularity as it was later offered to younger students beginning in the first grade (Hadisantosa, 2010). By 2006, English was allocated two credit hours per week as local content under the Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP) framework (Lesia & Petrus, 2021). However, with the introduction of the 2013 curriculum, English shifted from being a mandatory subject to an elective extracurricular activity, requiring teachers to adapt to new standards (Salim & Hanif, 2021). According to the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's Regulation Number 12 of 2024, English will become a compulsory subject again in elementary schools and *madrasah ibtidaiyah* starting in the 2027/2028 academic year. Despite these policy developments, research indicates that many elementary school teachers lack formal education and qualifications in English, and some have limited experience teaching the language to young learners. This shortage of adequately prepared teachers poses challenges to students' language acquisition and

engagement in learning English (Angraeni & Yusuf, 2022; Laila et al., 2023; Lesia & Petrus, 2021; Mutiah et al., 2020).

Mutiah et al. (2020) pointed out that most English teacher education programs in Indonesia primarily prepare teachers for secondary schools, resulting in a gap in specialized training for teaching young learners, including child-centered teaching methods. To address this, the English Language Education Department should either develop a dedicated curriculum focused on Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) for pre-service teachers or offer in-service training for those already teaching young learners (Setyaningrum et al., 2022). Both pre-service and in-service EYL teachers need to be well-versed in lesson planning, classroom management, and the application of effective teaching strategies (Beribe, 2023). Additionally, students are expected to complete a teaching practice organized by their study program before finishing their training.

Some universities in Indonesia offer pre-service teaching programs for English to Young Learners (EYL) as an elective course, part of the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) program, or as a concentration, usually worth two credit points (Zein, 2015). However, not all English language education departments in Indonesia consider it essential to provide advanced training for pre-service teachers (PSTs) specifically focused on teaching English to young learners (Setyaningrum et al., 2022). Because of this, there is a clear need to develop a specialized curriculum aimed at preparing future English teachers effectively (Setyaningrum et al., 2022). Given the increasing importance of English instruction for young learners and the policy requiring English to be a compulsory subject in

primary schools, teacher preparation becomes even more crucial. In response, the Center of Excellence (CoE) EYL program at ELED UMM has been established to strategically prepare pre-service teachers with the pedagogical skills needed to meet these growing demands.

Integrating digital tools is a crucial aspect of teaching English to children in Indonesia, and the CoE EYL program has the potential to be a major contributor in this field. With advances in communication technology, people can easily keep up with global events, making English an increasingly important language for everyone (Musiman et al., 2020). Utilizing technologies like digital textbooks and multimedia materials helps create interactive learning environments (Adisti et al., 2023; Respati et al., 2024). This represents a move towards more modern teaching methods that cater to different learning styles, enhance students' understanding of the language, and help overcome challenges associated with traditional teaching techniques (Winola, 2021).

Many teachers continue to struggle with incorporating technology into their classrooms because of limited time, insufficient knowledge, and a lack of proper facilities (Amelia et al., 2020). Furthermore, not all English language education departments in Indonesia have prioritized training pre-service teachers (PSTs) of young learners with advanced teaching programs (Setyaningrum et al., 2022). Consequently, many PSTs graduate without the necessary skills to effectively teach English to young learners, lacking an important understanding of language acquisition, age-appropriate materials and methods, as well as the psychological needs of children. Research by Khulel and Wibowo (2021) highlights that teachers

frequently encounter significant challenges in implementing the curriculum due to inadequate infrastructure and limited institutional support. These issues are even more pronounced in rural areas, where access to educational resources, including technology, remains scarce. Therefore, it is crucial for English education departments to develop specialized materials for both pre-service and in-service teachers that meet the needs of today's educational environment.

2.2 Characteristics of Young Learners and EYL Teachers

2.2.1 Characteristics of Young Learners

Children acquire language at different rates; some learn quickly, while others need more time (Pradnyana et al., 2022). They also note that many students tend to be passive learners who respond well to activities that encourage active participation. According to Widodo (2005) young language learners begin with simple phrases and gradually develop new expressions as they encounter more abstract language rules. These learners are capable of collaborating and learning from their peers, have clear preferences about what they enjoy or dislike, are open to classroom experiences and sometimes question their teachers' decisions, and often rely on concrete realities to understand and communicate meaning. Furthermore, Pradnyana et al. (2022) recommend using movement and sensory activities in lessons to better engage students and help sustain their focus.

The readiness of young learners to acquire a new language is greatly influenced by their home environment and early exposure to English. The length and quality of these early experiences play a crucial role in determining their later academic success in English (Chen et al., 2020). For example, children who

encounter English through playful and immersive activities tend to develop stronger language skills as they advance in school (Zhao et al., 2024). On the other hand, limited exposure to English over extended periods can impede language development, emphasizing the importance of consistent and early engagement with the language.

2.2.2 Characteristic of EYL Teachers

Researchers emphasize that teachers need to acquire appropriate knowledge and resources before introducing young learners to literature or other educational materials (Raudyatuzzahra, 2023). This preparation involves understanding children's literature, effective teaching methods, and potential challenges in using these materials in the classroom. It is essential for teachers to employ pedagogical strategies that not only facilitate learning but also boost student engagement through methods that are relevant to their culture, as demonstrated by the Shona cultural context, which impacts the development of young learners' critical thinking skills (Leah & Sikhangezile, 2024).

Effective language teachers need to be flexible, open-minded, and responsive to the needs and learning objectives of their students (Spolsky, 1989). Lengkawati (2016) points out that in Indonesia, the teaching-learning relationship is often seen as teacher-centered, with students still relying heavily on teachers for information rather than independently seeking it out. Since students frequently study alongside their teachers and view them as role models, teachers play a crucial role in the English learning process (Meisani, 2022). Good teachers recognize their core responsibility to motivate students to engage in continuous learning (Díaz et al.,

2015). Qualities such as pedagogical skills, motivation, and readiness significantly influence a teacher's ability to foster an effective learning environment. Consequently, professional development programs need to evolve to meet the unique demands of early childhood educators, placing particular emphasis on their emotional and psychological readiness, which has a direct impact on their teaching performance (Wang, 2023).

An English teacher's objectives and duties in the classroom play a crucial role in helping students achieve the best outcomes (Ly, 2024). Research by Marinić and Moritz (2024) highlights Vygotsky's idea that teachers should offer materials that encourage basic interaction and collaboration among students, as social connections are vital for language learning at the young learner stage. However, many elementary schools' English teachers struggle to find and utilize appropriate teaching resources, often relying heavily on materials provided by their schools, such as worksheets, textbooks, and slide presentations for classroom activities (Pradnyana et al., 2022).

A teacher's ability to integrate technology into learning activities is essential for creating effective educational experiences for young learners (Alan, 2021). Tarigan (2021) emphasizes that both teachers and students need to quickly adapt to emerging educational technologies, which demands substantial training for educators. The aim of improving teachers' digital skills is to ensure that students develop these important competencies by the time they complete their compulsory education (Sánchez-Cruzado et al., 2021). However, many still face challenges such as limited access to technology and the need for ongoing professional development

to use these tools effectively. Competence involves not only the ability to operate specific devices or tools but also understanding how to achieve goals in particular contexts (Sánchez-Cruzado et al., 2021). By combining better access to resources with continuous support, teachers can promote more independent, student-centered learning and better prepare students for life in a globalized world.

In Indonesia, Wijayanti et al. (2025) identified that major challenges include limited resources, speaking skills, and vocabulary. Therefore, pre-service teacher (PST) programs should prepare future EYL teachers not only to use existing materials but also to develop, adapt, and apply them according to the specific traits and needs of their students. With technological advancements, achieving these goals becomes more feasible and flexible. In teaching English as a foreign language to young learners, these capabilities are crucial to support their second language development effectively.

To align with the qualities needed for EYL teachers, pre-service teachers (PSTs) enrolled in the CoE EYL program are trained to incorporate teaching methods that involve contextual and interactive activities, such as role-playing and games, which help students engage with language structures. Research shows that including songs in lessons not only enhances vocabulary understanding but also makes the learning experience more memorable, supporting better language retention (Fauzi, 2022). Additionally, using game-based learning has been found to accelerate vocabulary acquisition, making the process more enjoyable and less daunting for young learners (Fidyaningrum et al., 2021).

2.3 Teaching English to Young Learners in 21st Century

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, which affected every continent except Antarctica, people worldwide turned to online education as a way to keep up with technological progress (Krishan et al., 2020). Being part of a digital generation, today's students require teaching approaches that incorporate information and communication technologies to address their learning needs (Jamalai & Krish, 2023). The rise of ICT has shifted educational expectations, placing greater demands on teachers to adapt their methods and materials for young learners in ways that align with the development of 21st-century skills (Şahin & Han, 2020). Nevertheless, major obstacles such as limited facilities, as well as gaps in teachers' digital skills and knowledge, continue to hinder the effective integration of technology in classrooms (Taghizadeh & Hasani, 2020).

21st-century learners are highly independent and skilled in using technology (Hirschman & Wood, 2018). As these learners develop, teachers must adapt their approaches to meet their evolving needs and improve their instructional methods (Çakır & Güngör, 2017). Educators should assess whether their current teaching strategies effectively prepare students with the skills required for the modern workforce, guided by 21st-century frameworks (González-Pérez & Ramírez-Montoya, 2022). These frameworks highlight three key competencies: (1) learning skills, including creativity, innovation, and problem-solving; (2) literacy skills, covering media, information, and ICT literacy; and (3) life skills, such as initiative, flexibility, adaptability, social and intercultural abilities, productivity, accountability, leadership, and responsibility. Problem-solving and critical thinking

are particularly vital for equipping students to handle complex challenges in their careers (Szabo et al., 2020). According to 21st-century educational models, effective teaching and learning methods are essential for nurturing comprehensive skills and integrating technology (González-Pérez & Ramírez-Montoya, 2022). The use of appropriate technologies supports structured and logical teaching processes, helping achieve educational goals and assess learning outcomes (González-Pérez & Ramírez-Montoya, 2022). However, Varghese and Musthafa (2021) point out a gap between teachers' perceptions of these skills and their actual application, often due to a lack of alignment between curriculum and teaching methods.

In Indonesia, many pre-service teachers (PSTs) are not adequately prepared for Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL). Wijayanti et al. (2025) found that a significant number of PSTs were unaware of the upcoming policy making English a compulsory subject and expressed concerns about their vocabulary and speaking skills. To address this, efforts have been made to introduce innovations at the PST level. According to Setyaningrum et al. (2022) English language education departments have encouraged PSTs to adopt student-centered, culturally relevant, and thematic lessons aligned with the principles of English as an International Language (EIL). Additionally, Lee and Kim (2025) reported that PSTs enhanced their skills by applying theory in practice, such as designing metaverse-based platforms for English classes. Lestiono (2023) suggested that mobile-assisted learning and AI-based chatbots can boost student motivation, provide flexibility, and reduce anxiety. Similarly, Aini et al. (2022) found that digital tools like the Hello App significantly improved students' speaking skills during remote learning

amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these benefits, policy challenges remain; under the 2013 Indonesian curriculum, English was downgraded to an extracurricular subject, leading to inconsistent implementation of TEYL (Musiman et al., 2020; Zein, 2017).

This shift encourages students to be the main focus during the learning process, where they are required to actively engage in solving problems related to the learning material (Hastuti et al., 2023). According to Obera et al. (2023), Adapting teaching methods to boost student engagement is crucial for fostering autonomy and supporting effective English language learning. Additionally, Jabulisile and Sphelele (2023) emphasize that active participation is vital, as collaborative learning activities help enhance positive interactions and build students' confidence.

Ongoing training enables teachers to stay updated with current teaching trends, thereby improving their capacity to help students develop 21st-century skills (Alzahrani & Nor, 2022). Well-structured professional development programs provide educators with the skills needed to apply innovative teaching methods that foster students' skill growth (Sumiati et al., 2020). Noh and Karim (2021) argue that when teachers adopt design-thinking approaches—such as user-centered design, empathy, collaboration, optimism, experimentation, prototyping, and mindfulness of processes—students' creativity and innovation in the context of Education 4.0 are enhanced. Exploring how students acquire 21st-century skills in the classroom offers valuable insights into implementing skill-based education effectively (Avdiu et al., 2025).

2.4 Materials and Media for Teaching English to Young Learners

Selecting appropriate materials is vital in Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) to effectively develop their language skills. Research highlights that teaching materials and methods tailored for young learners should leverage children's natural curiosity and cognitive abilities to maximize learning (Sinambela et al., 2023). Using original and contextually relevant content can boost students' motivation and comprehension (Mandaria et al., 2022). Materials designed specifically for young learners' cognitive, emotional, and linguistic needs significantly enhance language acquisition, motivation, and engagement, as children respond better to entertaining and interactive activities rather than formal instruction (Aini et al., 2022; Harmer, 2007). Additionally, teaching resources should encourage creativity and critical thinking to help teachers design lessons that are meaningful and appropriate for young learners (Setyaningrum et al., 2022).

Children enjoy participating in interactive activities such as storytelling, painting, and listening to music, which play a vital role in their daily lives and help motivate them to learn English through play (Kuchah, 2013). They find learning meaningful when they use their imagination to role-play various future career roles, and learning activities for young learners should be designed with these interests in mind to ensure success (Salim & Hanif, 2021). The Total Physical Response (TPR) method, which combines speech, movement, and commands, is effective in helping young children improve their English skills (Mutiah et al., 2020). Additionally, visual aids and context-based materials assist young learners in understanding meaning without relying heavily on translation, helping them bridge the gap

between language and context. Storytelling, in particular, provides context that supports vocabulary acquisition, listening skills, sentence structure imitation, and informal speaking practice (Marinić & Moritz, 2024). English teachers need to be well-prepared with the skills and resources required to navigate the challenges of multicultural classrooms, where diverse student backgrounds can affect understanding and engagement (Kustati et al., 2020). Santosa et al. (2022) highlight that integrating ICT into primary English classrooms in Indonesia helps make learning activities more engaging, dynamic, and tailored to students' needs. Digital platforms play a key role in motivating young learners by offering access to a wide range of interesting and relevant listening and reading materials (Atmowardoyo et al., 2021). This is particularly crucial in today's globalized world, where students are exposed to English through multiple sources (Anjarini et al., 2020).

Digital media such as websites, educational apps, and interactive games play a significant role in enhancing young learners' language experience and comprehension (Saminder Singh & Nagarajah, 2024). Online learning platforms that incorporate gamification elements improve students' learning experiences and enable them to study English from home more effectively (Singh & Nagarajah, 2024). Technologies like DialogFlow (an AI-based chatbot), Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), Cake App, Puppet Pals App, Mind Map App, flip books, and social media allow students to practice English through role-plays, pronunciation exercises, and storytelling in a self-directed learning environment (Lestiono, 2023). Additionally, platforms like Gather.Town uses task-based interactions, virtual environments, and real-time communication to provide

authentic activities and engagement for young learners (Lee & Kim, 2025). These tools make both teaching and learning in EYL classrooms more immersive and interactive.

2.5 Utilizing Technology for Teaching Young Learners English Vocabulary

The widespread adoption of technology in classrooms has greatly changed the way students learn and interact with the world around them. The use of technology in teaching English to young learners has gained significant attention in academic circles, especially as educational approaches evolve. Incorporating media like videos and games makes classroom activities more engaging. Videos, combining visual and auditory elements, effectively capture young children's attention, which is essential for maintaining their focus and interest (Zamzami & Zamzami, 2023). Additionally, gamification fosters a more interactive learning environment, encouraging students to be enthusiastic and creative (Zhang, 2024). This shift is further supported by the ongoing integration of various digital tools that promote active participation among students (Winola, 2021). As a result, the move toward technology-enhanced teaching underscores the importance of continuous professional development for educators in digital settings (Wiraatmaja et al., 2021). Teachers who embrace innovative technologies often inspire students to cultivate creativity, independence, and self-directed learning (Aghni, 2022).

Vocabulary plays a key role in language learning, serving as the foundation for developing speaking, reading, listening, and writing skills, and is vital for effective communication. Audio-visual materials like videos, animations, and interactive elements significantly improve vocabulary retention and understanding

among young EFL learners. These multimodal tools engage students more actively than traditional memorization techniques, catering to different learning styles and encouraging participation, which supports long-term learning (Setiawan & Firdaus, 2025). Therefore, incorporating such resources makes vocabulary acquisition both more meaningful and enjoyable.

The use of digital media in teaching vocabulary boosts student engagement and enthusiasm (Laloan, 2022). Technology aids vocabulary retention by increasing learners' exposure through social media and online games, encouraging them to discover meanings and use new words in everyday contexts (Laloan, 2022). However, successful integration depends on support from parents, teachers, and schools. Parents play a role in motivating students and providing necessary resources, while schools must ensure adequate infrastructure and support, and teachers are responsible for choosing suitable digital tools to actively involve students and enhance vocabulary learning (Laloan, 2022).

Several technologies effectively support vocabulary learning. HelloTalk connects learners with native speakers for real-time conversations, providing translation and correction features that enhance vocabulary and cultural understanding (Nugroho et al., 2021). YouTube offers engaging audio-visual materials that help reinforce vocabulary through multimedia content (Laloan, 2022). Digital storytelling employs meaningful narratives to motivate learners and deepen their grasp of vocabulary (Maya & Halim, 2021). Wordwall provides interactive games such as quizzes and word searches, making vocabulary practice enjoyable and effective (Pradini & Adnyayanti, 2022). Collectively, these tools

foster interactive and motivating learning environments that improve vocabulary acquisition, particularly in online settings (Laloan, 2022).

While technology offers many advantages for teaching vocabulary to young learners, it is important to focus on developing their digital literacy skills and ensuring they have access to suitable tools. Building these skills enables students to use technology effectively to improve their vocabulary and communication abilities (Liu et al., 2024). Additionally, successful vocabulary learning through technology relies heavily on teachers' capacity to choose and apply the right digital resources. Research shows that tools like interactive displays and classroom audio systems enhance vocabulary instruction by encouraging active engagement, providing immediate feedback, and fostering collaboration among young learners. These technologies help create dynamic learning environments that support deeper vocabulary comprehension and overall language growth (Ardiana & Sari, 2025). Consequently, continuous professional development and strong institutional support are crucial to help educators fully harness technology's potential in vocabulary teaching.

Gather.Town enhances vocabulary learning by offering a gamified, interactive virtual space where learners navigate 2D maps using avatars, enabling proximity-based video and audio communication that closely simulates real-life social interactions. Teachers can create themed environments, such as restaurants or hospitals, embedding target vocabulary into role-play scenarios that allow students to practice language in meaningful, contextual settings. The platform supports both teacher-led and self-paced activities, promoting engagement,

collaboration, and community building—key factors for language acquisition. Its spatial audio feature encourages natural conversations and diverse interaction topics, improving oral proficiency and communicative skills beyond what traditional video conferencing tools offer (McClure & Williams, 2021; Zhao & McClure, 2024).

2.6 How to Integrate Gather.Town in Teaching Young Learners English Vocabulary

Research by Akramy et al. (2022) highlights several effective vocabularies teaching techniques, emphasizing the use of visual aids to explicitly link words with images for better comprehension. Flashcards, which often include a word, sentence, or simple picture, are particularly useful for learning new vocabulary, while encouraging lexical inferences helps students deduce meanings from context. Engaging games like charades, Pictionary, and bingo further enhance vocabulary learning, and incorporating songs, movies, and videos provides contextual and auditory input that supports acquisition. Complementing these methods, Fauziningrum et al. (2023) Identify additional strategies such as pinpointing difficult words in textbooks, using pictures or objects (e.g., a wheelchair) to explain vocabulary, and employing mime or gestures to convey meaning non-verbally. They also highlight the importance of context strategies that explain words in various situations to deepen understanding, alongside direct explanation, dictionary use, summarizing, and game-based approaches. Other techniques like translation, enumeration, realia (using real objects), content-based teaching, and presentation strategies further diversify vocabulary instruction to address learners' varied needs.

Building on these traditional and diverse methods, effectively incorporating Gather.Town into English vocabulary to young learners requires teachers to have strong digital literacy and pedagogical skills. These competencies allow educators to confidently use digital platforms and create engaging, technology-enhanced vocabulary learning experiences. Gather.Town offers a visually rich, gamified environment that enhances vocabulary instruction by placing learners in authentic, immersive settings (Tanjaya & Tjhin, 2023). Its variety of virtual maps—such as schools, hospitals, or conference rooms—enables students to practice vocabulary through role-playing and simulations, making language learning both meaningful and memorable (Zhao & McClure, 2024). For instance, learners can act as doctors and patients to practice medical terms or design posters in a conference scenario to reinforce thematic vocabulary.

Compared to other metaverse platforms, Gather.Town is distinguished by its simplicity, easy accessibility, and strong focus on social interaction—features that are especially important for ensuring young learners feel comfortable and engaged (Ha, 2024). Its proximity-based video conferencing and customizable virtual environments support both synchronous and asynchronous learning, allowing students to learn at their own pace and practice vocabulary (McClure & Williams, 2021). Additionally, teachers can set up private rooms for small group work or individual support, promoting meaningful interactions that effectively boost vocabulary acquisition.

Recent research further confirms the effectiveness of Gather.Town in language learning settings. Kuswendi and Setiyadi (2024) discovered that

elementary students using Gather.Town experienced notable improvements in interpersonal skills like communication and problem-solving, which are closely connected to successful language use. The platform's interactive, avatar-driven environment promotes collaboration and key elements for practicing and internalizing new vocabulary. These results indicate that incorporating Gather.Town into vocabulary lessons not only increases student engagement but also enhances the social aspects of language learning that are vital for young learners.

Based on a personal interview with Teacher D, who has practiced using Gather.Town to teach young learners English, the integration flow in his teaching is as follows: Pre-Teaching: The session begins with greetings, followed by a short virtual campus tour. Then, students warm up by singing an opening classroom song. The teacher explains the activities planned for the lesson and asks some introductory questions to engage the students. Whilst-Teaching: The teacher directs students to log into Gather.Town and create their avatars. He then guides them on a virtual tour to explore the environment and play games such as racing and chess. Students respond to simple questions about their experience. Next, they gather at Podium Island, where the teacher introduces new vocabulary related to New Year. Students practice by playing online ESL vocabulary games focused on electronic devices around computers, supported by videos and PDFs. Finally, they aim to achieve high scores in the games and review the vocabulary together in a summary session. Post-Teaching: To close the lesson, the teacher and students gather their

avatars near the Fountain or Campfire area and sing a closing classroom song together, creating a fun and memorable atmosphere before ending the session.

Using Gather.Town, Fitria (2021) explained that she did similar activities in Gather.Town: Getting Started (Step-by-Step)

1. Visit <https://gather.town> using Google Chrome.
2. Click “Launch Gather” → then select “Create New Space.”
3. Enter a name for your space and set a password if needed.
4. Choose a map, such as a classroom or playground.
5. Create your avatar by selecting a hairstyle, outfit, and name.
6. Check your camera, microphone, and speakers.
7. Click “Join the Gathering” to enter the virtual room.
8. Invite students by clicking “participation” to “Invite to copy and share the link.”

Based on the experiences shared, the researcher summarizes the integration of Gather.Town in teaching vocabulary as follows: Gather.Town offers an immersive and interactive learning space where students engage with vocabulary through movement, conversation, and teamwork. Teachers can create virtual environments that resemble classrooms or themed settings, such as markets, parks, or houses, aligned with the vocabulary focus. Young learners interact with objects, peers, and embedded media within these spaces, making vocabulary learning more contextual and meaningful.

Activities within Gather.Town can include word hunts, role-plays, matching games, and video-based discussions, all conducted in the virtual environment. Features like text chat, video and audio communication, Google Docs integration, and embedded videos support multimodal learning styles. Teachers can encourage students to actively explore, observe, and use new vocabulary within this setting. The platform's step-by-step setup is straightforward, making it accessible for both beginner teachers and young learners. Its gamified and social aspects help lower anxiety and boost motivation among students. Overall, Gather.Town provides a dynamic platform that transforms vocabulary teaching into an engaging, exploratory, and student-centered experience.

