

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

In the era of globalization, mastering English from an early age has become a priority in education because it is an international language used in various fields, such as education, technology, and global communication. In the context of language learning, young learners are children in the early stages of cognitive and language development, from early childhood to the early years of elementary school (Cameron, 2001). In early childhood education, young learners are typically between four and six years old. At this age, children begin to actively explore their environment, imitate words, and develop basic communication skills.

Children in this age group are also in their "golden age," a crucial period of rapid growth and development, making them more receptive to various stimuli (Uce, 2017). Six important aspects at this time are religion and values, social-emotional development, cognitive development, motor skills, and the arts. One important aspect to encourage is language development because it is the main tool children use to interact with and understand the world around them (Susanto, 2012). Therefore, early childhood English teaching must be well designed and in accordance with children's developmental characteristics to make the learning process more effective and meaningful.

One challenge in early childhood education is the relatively short attention span of children and their need for physical stimulation and direct experience. They need more than static verbal or visual information; they need to be involved in activities that stimulate their senses and motor skills (Hasanah, 2016). Research shows that sensory play activities can increase engagement in learning and help children maintain focus because learning involves the direct use of multiple senses (Lestari, Putri, & Rachmi, 2025). Preliminary observations at an early childhood education institution revealed that learning materials were dominated by picture books and passive teacher explanations. In this situation,

some children appeared to lose focus easily and shift their attention quickly. They were also less interested in reading or exploring books for long periods of time.

Children showed greater interest when they were given learning materials that allowed them to interact directly with books. They paid more attention to the books, actively turned the pages, and were more focused on the learning activities. Additionally, they appeared more enthusiastic and happier when they saw brightly colored book designs and attractive illustrations. These results demonstrate that visually appealing designs and sensory-engaging activities can enhance children's engagement in learning and sustain their attention throughout the learning process.

In contrast, the tools used in daily learning tend to be passive, which makes it easy for children to lose concentration. Therefore, there is a need for more interactive learning tools. This study developed the English Smart Book to teach English to children. Designed with an exploration concept, this book combines attractive visual elements and sensory play activities so children can interact directly with the learning material. The interactive, multisensory design is expected to increase engagement and help children stay focused.

In the design of learning media, visual elements play a crucial role in capturing the attention of young children, who tend to have short attention spans. According to research by Rohman and Mahesti (2024), the graphic elements of children's books, particularly the covers, are important in sparking children's interest in reading. Design elements such as color, font, and images must be carefully selected to visually convey messages and provide reading comfort. Important characteristics of children's book design include the use of bright but comfortable colors, simple and easy-to-read fonts, and attractive and easy-to-understand images. In the development of the Smart Book: *Mumu's Garden Adventure*, for example, the visual elements are designed to be attractive and are combined with sensory play activities so that children can interact directly with the learning content. This interactive, multisensory design is expected to increase children's engagement and help them stay focused while learning.

These findings demonstrate that visualization serves not only as an aesthetic element but also as part of an educational communication strategy. Attractive illustrations in children's books can help children better understand and remember the material being taught (Wardaya et al., 2020). Pictures of everyday objects, animals, or simple activities in attractive colors can help children connect images with meanings or vocabulary they are learning. Other studies have revealed that using colors, images, and simple designs can increase children's attention and understanding during the learning process (Mayer, 2009).

Therefore, when developing English learning materials for children aged 4-6 years, the visual design elements, such as the books' layout, color choices, font types, and illustrations, must be tailored to their characteristics. The books are designed to be large enough so that the pictures and text are clear and easy for children to see and hold. The layout is simple, with enough space so children can focus on one main piece of information per page. Bright, contrasting colors attract children's attention without causing visual fatigue. Additionally, the font is large and simple to help children who are learning to read recognize it easily. Relevant and expressive illustrations help children associate images with the English vocabulary they are learning. These visual elements are expected to support children's participation and maintain their attention during the learning process.

However, conventional learning media often rely on two-dimensional visual displays that lack direct interaction with children. The sensory play approach allows children to see pictures, touch textures, move parts of the book, and actively interact with the media. Integrating appropriate graphic design with sensory activities creates a more interactive and meaningful learning experience.

These challenges highlight the need for innovative learning media that present English language material and integrate the principles of children's book graphic design and sensory play activities. However, learning media that combine visual design elements with multisensory interaction for early childhood education are still limited. This study uses a research and development

(R&D) approach to design sensory play activities for an English smart book titled Little Explorer's Word Adventure to serve as a learning medium for children aged 4–6.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the research background, this study aims to address the following questions:

1. What visual designs and sensory elements are included in the English Smart Book for children aged 4-6?
2. How do teachers and students respond to the development of the English Smart Book integrated with sensory play activities?

1.3 Research Objectives

Based on the above problem formulation, the objective of this study are as follows:

1. To describe the process of designing sensory play in the English Smart Book as a learning medium for children aged 4-6.
2. To determine and analyze teachers' and students' responses to the application of the English Smart Book based on sensory play.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to contribute to the academic development of sensory, play-based English learning media through a visual design approach. Building on a study of children's illustrated books that emphasizes the importance of illustrations, layout, typography, and age-appropriate visual concepts (Ardiansyah & Mataram, 2021), this study reinforces the idea that design is an educational communication strategy, not just an aesthetic aspect. Thus, this study enriches the study of visual design integrity and sensory activities in the development of English Smart Books for children aged 4-6 years.

Methodologically, the study contributes to applying the research and development (R&D) method to the design of learning media, including needs analysis, design, and expert validation. This approach aligns with interactive media development research that emphasizes designing for the characteristics and sensory abilities of children aged 4–6 years.

In practice, the results of the sensory play design in the English Smart Book are expected to serve as an interactive and interesting alternative learning medium appropriate for children aged 4-6 years. This medium is designed to promote active English learning by stimulating children's senses.

1.5 Output of the Research

This research yielded a sensory, play-based English Smart Book, a learning media product designed for children aged 4-6. Using a research and development (R&D) approach, the product was designed with a focus on visual design and sensory activities as a strategy for teaching English to children.

The Smart Book's design considers the principles of visual communication design for children, including typography, balance between text and illustrations, the use of colors appropriate for children, and the selection of illustrations that are both communicative and attractive. Additionally, interactive learning media that considers the characteristics of early childhood play an important role in language development and learning motivation (Smaldino et al., 2019).

The final technical specifications, such as book size, font selection, color scheme, and illustration details, will be determined after the needs analysis and expert validation stages of the research process.